

The
Song
of the
Prairie
Land

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THE SONG OF THE PRAIRIE LAND

AND OTHER POEMS

BY
WILSON MACDONALD

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**THE SONG OF THE PRAIRIE LAND
AND OTHER POEMS**

Song of the Prairie Land and Other Poems

By
Wilson MacDonald

With an Introduction by
Albert E. S. Smythe

Cover design by the author

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INTRODUCTION

I FIRST met Wilson MacDonald in 1911. I had come across a remarkable poem, "The Shame of Goderich," of considerable length, in a country paper. I was impressed with its power, its gift of expression, its originality, its humanitarianism. It seemed to be the shame of Toronto that it should not be more widely known. Of course there was difficulty in getting it into a Toronto paper. Its length was against it. So was its quality. Newspapers will print doggerel by the yard, but as a rule their columns are closed to good poetry. However, "The Shame of Goderich" duly appeared, signed "Frederick Maclean."

One day subsequently a dark romantic figure appeared at my office door. I thought at once of Kyrle Bellew in the Apothecary scene in "Romeo and Juliet," the only actor I ever saw do it justice. Here was the same slight, lithe, graceful Italian figure, the same dark eyes and olive complexion, the same strange inscrutable smile of the shy but friendly soul.

"I am Wilson MacDonald," spoke the stranger. That conveyed nothing. "Yes?" was the non-committal editorial response. "I am Frederick Maclean," was the further venture, and after that the fountains of the great deep were unloosed.

Wilson MacDonald grows on acquaintance. He is like Africa or any other unexplored continent, full of surprising and delightful mysteries. That he is a genius I have no doubt whatever. His many-sided nature is outside the range of our ordinary garden varieties. Any one of his gifts would make a man remarkable.

The volume of poetry to which this is a prelude is sufficient distinction for one man's accomplishment, but Wilson MacDonald has so many other treasures in his storehouse that one hesitates to say that this is the greatest, supreme as it may be. He brings forth things new and old.

It was in no modern school he learned his art of design and illumination, and if he issued a volume of these exquisitely beautiful creations the rivalry among his gifts would be obvious. He has written songs, both words and music, and he produces nothing commonplace. He has written operas, not merely the words, not merely the music, but the whole composition, scenery, dances, costumes, all from one fertile brain. He is an inventor and has patented several profitable devices. If it should occur to him to become commercial or mercenary I believe he could juggle finance with the same easy legerdemain by which he confounds the greatest conjurers of the stage.

Among all his gifts nothing appeals to me like the source of them, the shy, timid, childlike soul, such as are of the Kingdom. Children love him—nay, they adore him. He is of their kin and fellowship.

Who is Wilson MacDonald? Only the records of palingenesis can reveal that secret, but I fancy that he

has wandered from the lost Etruscan paradise and brought with him many of the arts and mysteries that glorified that ancient people. The Keltic life burns in his blood, and he is Canadian through four generations: Cheapside and Woodstock and Toronto and Vancouver have fostered him. He is an alumnus of McMaster, and for the last seven or eight years he has expanded in the west and helped the west to expand. In the sequestered valleys of British Columbia he is most content, and all cities and city ways are irksome to him. But he loves humanity too well to abandon mankind because men are ill-developed.

This book concerns his poetry, and of that something should be said. Herein is only a moiety of what he has written, and to my mind some of the greatest things have been omitted. "The Victoria Cross of God," for example, or "The Puppets."

All new poets who are not echoes or reflections appeal to new audiences, and sometimes it takes a long time for the audience to find itself. Readers of poetry are as nervous of new poets as amateur mycologists are of mushrooms; they want to see some one else eat them first. The simile does not carry far, for some readers love to regale themselves on toadstools. In a general way, however, it must be admitted that a taste for poetry and particularly new poetry is acquired, often with effort, and is the result of some culture. So I would not be disappointed if Wilson MacDonald's poetry made its way slowly, especially in the United States, where poetry must

have rag and jazz in it to be appreciated, and Walt Whitman is still outlawed.

But on the other hand I would not be surprised if Wilson MacDonald found a large, immediate hearing, because he reaches deep into the common heart. He is like Thomas Hood in that respect, and he is as great a lyric artist, as pathetic, and, it may yet prove, as humorous.

Still more he reminds me, not by imitation or reminiscence, but by common sympathies, of Keats and Shelley, of Wordsworth and Lanier, and of Sydney Dobell and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. At 38, Wilson MacDonald has thought profoundly, observed keenly, and has given Canada what no other poet has done in being utterly and entirely Canadian, and the spirit of his poetry is a prophecy of the extent and the future of Canadianism. We shall read these poems and say, not only is this what in Canada has been, but what in Canada shall be.

Wilson MacDonald is a master of free verse and of lyric also. He has invented new verse forms which compel the ear by their harmony and the novel chime of the rhyme. He has shown that if he writes free verse it is not for lack of facility in metrical art.

He is patriotic in Tennyson's cosmopolitan sense as he becomes a Canadian of the fourth generation. He can afford to think and say what might be suspected in the newly arrived, and he might even prove an over robust laureate for the Daughters of the Empire. But who has written such a ballad for them as "The Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun," and who has voiced such poetry

and passion and pathos as in his "Peace"? This latter I take to be one of the great poems of that war after which "Walks the old silence of the long ago." What poet but will envy this line?

One cannot characterize all his work, but let me refer to five typical poems or groups of poems. And first, those that deal with outdoor Canada. In "The Whippoor-will" he has written a poem that takes rank with Keats' "Nightingale" and Shelley's "Sky Lark." If anyone demurs, let him compare it with two fine poems of the second rank, James Hogg's "Skylark" or Eric MacKay's tribute to the same "little priest in grey apparel," and note the superiority. In "The Song of the Prairie Land" one has the same living intimacy with conditions that comparatively few have experienced. "The Whippoor-will" will be criticized by those who have never listened to the bird while the night-damps sank into their souls.

Ah! easy to hide from truth
In the city's haunted hole,
But you cannot hide on the prairies wide,
Where the winds uncloak the soul.

And in "The Song of the Snow Shoe Tramp" we have not only a ballad of Canadian life, but the testimony of the poet's art to his own purity of inclination.

There will come a time when we shall have great narrative poems from Wilson MacDonald. He has indicated his dramatic power in many pieces, notably "Trapper One and Trapper Two." A narrative poem of a different order is "Otus and Rismel," a "ballad of the long sea lanes." It is a poet's poem, but the lay reader can test

his own capacity for poetry by perusing it and seeking its secret, like the pearl hid in the field.

The years bridge chasms deep and wide;
They bridge them span by span,
And bolt and thong and tier are strong,
And true the Builder's plan.
And where the long white arches end
Stands Christ, the Son of Man.

There are unappreciative readers of poetry, and Wilson MacDonald, with his imperturbable universality, can get down to their level, and under their skin also, as in "The Mongrel," where he speaks the vulgar tongue, to be understood of the people. It is the same voice that made "Bill Jones" the sensation of the west.

For my own choice and preference there are the poems that deal with the great issues of our modern thought, "the scorn of scorn, the hate of hate, the love of love." Wilson MacDonald is nowhere so impassioned as when he lifts his voice as the prophet of truth to his age. He would "ring in the Christ that is to be," and in that Spirit he has wrought marvels. I have already mentioned "The Puppets." There is a kindred note in "The Song of Better Understanding," and it leads one on to "The Song of Brotherhood," another of those chants of Barbary which move as with a spell. And there is "Barbary" itself, almost my favourite of all these rhythms.

O, we ride through the morning dews
To gird on the Master's shoes.
And we wait by night, while the stars burn white,
The soul of His smile to share.

There is one more little poem I wish to mention. I can scarcely think of it without tears. Into "Whist-Whee" Wilson MacDonald has crowded all the loveliness and all the loneliness of childhood, and the poem is filled with the infinite yearning of the seeking to save that which was lost. Is it a child, or an ideal? Is it love? Is it life?

I have written frankly as an admirer of Wilson MacDonald. The critics will have their say. They will tell us that confessional does not rhyme with bell, and they will find fault with his theology and berate his slang and his daring and his independence of their laws. But the Master is a law unto Himself. And if they miss his beauty, his purity, his truth, his religion, the life and strength of his poetry, they should take down the atlas and see if they don't miss Canada off the map of North America.

ALBERT E. S. SMYTHE.

**THE SONG OF THE PRAIRIE LAND
AND OTHER POEMS**

A Toast to Beauty.

“Give us a toast” they cried, “Our spirits wan;
Some florid theme, mirthic, debonair.
And poured me wine so red the favored air,
Through which it flowed, shall ever wear its stain.
And I, an outlaw in the wileless reign
Of that old, yellow monarch now adored,
Hung high my glass above the festive board
And cried: “A toast to Beauty, let us drain.”
“A jest,” they laughed, “to toss this liquid rose,
This fine, bacchanic bloom to one unknown
Saw to the foots on vagabondian streets.”
And I, a lycie lost amid their prose,
Saw the red vintage I must drink, alone,
Pale in my chalice to the tears of Keats.



PRELUDE

TWO jugs upon a table stood;
One ample of girth and sweet of cavern,
But a shapeless bit of homely wood
That you would scorn in the poorest tavern;
The other traced and interlaced
By the strange fancy of a Dorian
Was sloped and curved to a woman's waist,
And worthy the pen of a grim historian.

Caneo came over a purple shoulder
Where the vineyards crawl in the lazy sun;
A bold man, Caneo; no bolder
Ever a woman won.
Bold was he as all men grow bold
Who wash themselves long in the sun.

And Caneo carried a cask of wine
Where the grapes had flowed together.
He saw the vase with the rich design
And paused whether—
(Ah, wonderful gate of whether)
A wisp of juice would it hold, and he
Had a cask of wine to pour.
So, he filled the jug of homely wood,
The ample of girth and sweet of cavern,
And the journeymen found the wine was good
As they pledged their luck at the nearest tavern.

I am Caneo;
And my skin is brown from the comrade sun.
And my heart is a cluster of grapes; each one
Ripe and ready to flow together
In the channel sweet of a purple song.
And I stand at the wonderful gates of "whether,"
Lusty and true and strong.
Whether the verse that the poets favored,
Wrought with Dorian taste and skill,
Or a basin of rock, by the sea flavored,
Shall be the cup I fill.

Here is the basin of rock, lean low,
Drink of me for the wine hath a tang
Not only of me but the sea.
And thy lips shall give it a tang of thee.
The years grow cold unto Poesy; haste,
O haste;
For the wine is strong as the drinker's taste.

THE CRY OF THE SONG CHILDREN

SAY not I write to a metre's measure
Who gather my words in flood.
Say not I write for the lilting's pleasure,
For lo! my ink is blood.
O, if these lines could show my passion:
Look is the blood not rich and red!
I will pour it out till my soul is ashen
And my grief lies dead.

I am a fragment of restless wind
Against the peak of a mountain broken.
My heart is oft with the snow entwined
And wears as a sweet token,
Wherever I move, or ever I run,
The sting of the frost and the kiss of the sun
To show that I favor no pilgrim more
Than the next who knocks at my cheerful door.

As a woman, athirst for an infant's cry,
Rocks her thin arms to the cooing air
And croons a Lydian lullaby
To soothe the child of her own despair,
So I go out on the hills at night
And rock my arms with a sad delight;
Rock them long
For the children of song
Which my barren page is athirst to bear.

The souls of these unborn crowd me round
And call to be clad
In the mystical, glad
Body of sound.
I am coming, I cry, to release you all.
The roses are red
On the sea-brown wall;
But the roses come and the roses fall;
And the children call,
And the children call;
But I am asearch for bread.
A wisp is here and a wisp is there;
A long day's march in the blinding dust,
And I gain the form of a fleeting crust
To lessen an hour's despair.

And I cry to God:
Shall my blood be shed
And my years be trampled away in the sod
For bread, for bread!
O, softly I cry, nor chide my fate.
But the rose hangs red
Far over the beautiful garden gate,
And the children wait.

I am Caneo;
And my skin is brown from the comrade sun.
And my heart is a cluster of grapes; each one
Ripe and ready to flow together
In the channel sweet of a purple song.
And the unborn children around me throng.

I will fill the air
With their floating hair,
I said.

And I rose when the morn was a film of grey
And moiled in a garden where love lay dead.
And the children called and I answered "Yea,
I come;" but the beckoning wisp of bread
Called me away, away.

And the children mourned as I lay in sleep;
When the night was deep
I could hear them weep.

This is the poet's Hell; to know
How rich a thing is his song's treasure;
To stand at night in the wind flow,
In a pure hour of leisure;
To call to his children and find
His voice is a broken chord
That is weary from calling all day in the wind:
"This hour's bread, O Lord."

Come little flaxen-haired,
Throat-bared,
Sun-brown-imp who hath called me long,
Here is your life in a song.
Dance here on this page, and never
To the last forever
Need you to call again.
I stole this hour to give you birth; the rain
Let down your hair.

The sky's
Deepest dyes
Tinctured your eyes.
Dear little flaxen-haired,
Throat-bared, wild,
Sun-brownèd child
Here is your life in a song undefiled.

The morn is a film of lovely gray;
And the rose is blown from a crimson thread;
But I am over the hills, and away
For Bread.

A SONG TO CANADA

MY land is a woman who knows
Not the child at her breast.
All her quest
Hath been gold.
All her joys, all her woes
With the thin, yellow leaf are unrolled.
And here is my grief that no longer she cares
For the tumult that crowds in a rune
When the white curving throat of a cataract bares
In a song to the high floating moon.
I am Caneo,
The poet she loves not, grown bold.
Bold am I as all men grow bold
Who wash themselves long in the sun:
I know what she lost when she gathered the gold
And she alone knows what she won.

My land is a woman who loves
All whose word is a lie;
The limitless doves
That coo in the hour when her peril is nigh;
The poets who sing:
"Very fair is the bride of the North
As she now steppeth forth
To enter that council which girdles the world with its
ring."
But this is my grief that no longer she cares
For the old wounding message of truth

That sounds on the lips of a poet, who dares
Look under the rouge of her youth.

My land is a woman whose boast
Is of iron and of stone.
She hath thrown
To the wind
All that yielded her most.
And to-night she must walk with the blind.
And this is my grief that her gold and her gain
Buys never a fragment of joy,
A morsel of truth or of honor a grain
Or a love that is free from alloy.

Hiss of hate or rain of applause,
I shall sing my song in a freeman's cause.
I have bathed in the spray
On the long, sweet sands of Digby Bay.
And from Labrador
To Juan de Fuca, the toreador,
Who tames the bull at our western door
I have smoothed each rood of my country's floor.
Great is all God lay on our sod,
The cricket's song or the Selkirk's reach;
And small is all we have given to God;
A heart of hate and a braggart's speech.
A span of steel and a tier of stone;
What boast to fling against His throne!
We twist His trees and they plough His main:
We sow His seed and we reap His grain;

Our kingdom's girth
Is the poet's toast:
But is it God or we should boast?

My love for my land is as strong
As the love of the sap for the tree;
For she is the channel through which I upreached to
the air.

In the lilt of my song
A garland of sheltering leaves I wove her to wear;
And she gave not a hint of her love to the sheen
Of their shimmering green,
But fingered away at her gold; I despair; I despair;
And yet comes a day she will listen to me.

I am Caneo,
The poet she loves not, grown bold:
Bold am I as all men grow bold
Who wash themselves long in the sun.
I know what she lost when she gathered the gold,
And she alone knows what she won.

Vancouver, B.C., December, 1916.

AT THE MODDER RIVER

BOOMING, booming, slowly booming; funeral dirges mouthed by cannon.

Ah, the Modder stream lies sullen; ne'er a movement stirs its bed.

O'er the veldt the darkness broodeth; scarce a shadow knows its image,

For the stars have veiled their faces, paying homage to the dead.

O, the veldt is drear and lonely and the graves have lost their number.

Sleep, remotest sons of Empire, joined in Death's imperial rest:

Hear a murmur, borne on sea-wave, speaking sorrow that ye slumber

Where the billows moan between you and your comrades of the West.

Booming, booming, slowly booming; war's grim requiem to the sleeper

Flung in tones of wrath majestic, speaking death notes in its rhyme.

There's a grave beneath the grasses but a heart is buried deeper;

And our lady bows in sadness with a grief that is sublime.

There's a grave without a garland save a lonesome
wreath of sorrow.

There's a hand that fain would fling a kindly token
at its head.

But to-day is wreathed a garland which shall burn
throughout the morrow

With the silent fires of maple in the memory of her
dead.

McMaster University, February, 1900.

A POET STOOD FORLORN

A POET stood forlorn at break of day.
His comrades had forsaken, one by one;
Lured by applause that greets the lesser play—
The perfect phrase to even cadence spun.
A poet stood forlorn;
His soul awinged, his foot upon a thorn.

Upon his left the wine cup's cheering glow;
Upon his right Delila's lustrous eyes.
Forward, the flagons of the melted snow
And holy manna broken in the skies:
And one small voice that said:
"My laurel wreath shall grace thy simple spread."

They stooped to do the Lesser Thing, and said:
"We will come back to-morrow to the Great,"
(My brother poets) "For we must be fed."
Does ever man return who thus tempts fate?
The foolish lamb is shorn:
But there's no tempered wind where thoughts are
born.

Were I not cold how should I come to know
One potent pleasure of the sun's sweet rays?
Or did I never breast the driving snow
What bliss were sweetest kernel of June days?
This Lesser Thing
Brings warmth that droops in drowsiness the wing.

Applause might hurt that look of straight intent
Until I lost the wonder of the whole.
There's music on the merchantman; my ship—
An argosy—is silent as my soul.
For them 'tis food and wine:
With one lone star my fasting soul shall dine.

“There's pleasant music in the whirring wheel;
Listen to it awhile; then to the seas.”
Thus spake the tempter; but I knew full well
Such sounds would haunt all future symphonies:
And through all time my verse
Would shroud its beauty in a soulless curse.

A perfect thing I might create, and then
Strike faultless notes with an impassioned hand.
But perfect phrase is not the speech of men
Whose brows are by the winds of passion fanned.
And they, who dare to rise,
Shall stumble most as they approach the skies.

Applauds the world the work of plane and rule:
Cheers the toy moon mounting the toy stage.
If stars were sown in even rows one school
Would praise Diana and her equipage.
Spirit of Cowper! rise.
In Pope we find too much perfection lies.

This is the Greater Thing I deem: a song
As sings the skylark in its roundelay;

Notes bursting, leaping, dancing in a throng;
Crowding like children loosed from school, for play:
A race on silver bells
Toward the mystic haunt where Beauty dwells.

Perchance the even music of the line
May stumble on some inharmonious sound—
Some proper discord that doth but refine—
For this should we reject the sweet when found?
The sparrow twitters true
In level phrase the skylark never knew.

The violet on the mountain side is scarred—
A beauty scar, the finger of the storm—
Ungentle winds have kissed the sea and marred
To greater beauty its impassioned form.
'Twas imperfection's gain
That split this elm and made it grow in twain.

In one famed park, that sires a perfect craft,
With listless steps but yestermorn I strolled.
Before me rose a sun-dial's mantled shaft
Whose shadows fell on gardens wrought in gold.
And here, beneath my feet,
I found a wild flower and its breath was sweet.

Torn were its petals; broken was its stem:
(A child of charity amid those flowers.)
I touched it as those faithful touched the hem
Of Jesu's garment, to enlist its powers.

And straightway I was healed;
The burdened sense was gone: wild music pealed.

Low bent the pine: the sunbeams danced on rocks:
Fair clouds drew silken veils across the sun.
The poplar dressed her elves in silver frocks.
(The wind transformed them from the sombre nun)
And laughter, half discord,
Pealed through the air—a tribute to the Lord.

Who gleans no beauty from a cold, gray sky
Doth gather none when it is flaming red.
Who knows no rapture when sad breezes sigh
Feels none, aright, when balmy zephyrs tread,
With whispering feet, on flowers
Yearning to bud beneath warm April showers.

There is more loveliness in one lone flower
That hungers, on the cliff, her parent mould
Than all the pomp, Arrangement, in its power,
Ever displayed in rows of shining gold.
The sweetest song of bird
Is that whose note is half guessed and half heard.

Methinks I see a group in Paradise.
(My brother poets who have gone before.)
There's gentle laughter in each spirit's eyes
That sends a merry message to this shore.
And wherefore all this mirth!
Their lowly glances ever seek the earth.

And where they look reclines a little band,
Themselves have dubbed the censors of our verse,
Who walk with stern iambics, in each hand,
And fixed rules with which to praise or curse;
And who declare as nought
The rugged phrase where poets trip on thought.

Cold critic! scornful since our time began
Of every templar of immortal muse;
What choric note conforms unto thy plan
Shall never light with passion's holy fuse.
For, since old Triton's horn
First woke the seas, the great have felt thy scorn.

"Browning insane or we" all Oxford cries.
The milk and water poet is our Keats.
Sad Poe and robust Whitman seek new skies;
And Goldsmith wears away old London's streets.
And Byron, fired by youth,
Strangles old Blackwood's with a grain of truth.

Shall Scottish pens subdue our English bards?
Or Yankee thimbles quench Canadian fires?
They prune their shrubs in Boston's timid yards
And shudder at Ungava's lordly spires.
And five small plots have they
Wherein a "man who fits" may, monthly, play.

Pray let me introduce this man; he writes
A cultured song—whatever may command.

He has a book : it says ; lights rhymes with nights ;
Jig rhymes with pig and sand with contraband.
(Poor Burns had no such book :
His rhyme beside this man's would sorry look.)

His verse is even as a sparrow's cry—
Always a passport on the modern mart.
God gives us men who dare where eagles fly ;
Who soar with bruised wing and bleeding heart
Above the crags of song
About whose base the vassal singers throng.

I'll play to some lone shepherd on the hill
The rugged harmonies that free my soul.
The Lesser Thing may please Ambition's will
But surely will it burn with shame my scroll.
O, brother poet, hear :
Stray back where steps are rough but skies are clear.

A poet stood forlorn at break of day :
His comrades had forsaken, one by one.
Yet, in his ear, an angel whispered : "They
Shall cease to sup when thy feast is begun.
Keep thou thine eye ahead :
They live the most who to the most are dead."

Dayton, Ohio, March, 1907.

SONG OF THE SNOWSHOE TRAMP

WHEN you're tired of the dance hall's hurry,
When you're cloyed with vaudeville jokes,
When you're heartily sick of bloodless girls
Looking languid in opera cloaks;
Come out with me to the open plain,
Through Nature's wide flung door,
And I'll cram more pleasure within your brain
Than ever was there before.
There's a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
And there's music in the pine;
And there's something now, in a balsam bough,
That touches the heart like wine.

I'll give you a girl with foot as light
As the brown leaf on the snow;
As the leaf that whirls with a mad delight
Whenever the winds do blow.
I'll give you a girl whom men call fair,
And God calls fairer still.
And it's hip and ho for the rolling snow
And the wood beyond the hill.

Ah! even now to my window floats
The soul of the cloistered spruce.
So fling in a corner the silk-lined coat
And the prisoned feet let loose.
Put on this cap, and this blanket wrap
And button about your breast:

And tie this sash where its silken flash
May flame to the east and west.

We carried the shoes to the marge of the town,
To the edge of a still white moor:
And we hummed a tune to the silver moon
As we made the thongs secure.
Then we blazed a trail, over field and rail,
In a white and fenceless land.
And we slid each hill, with a craftsman's skill,
And laughed at the sons of weaker will
Who pled for a friendly hand.

Then a lengthened chain spread over the plain
As each couple drew apart;
For a lad had something to tell a lass
That long had troubled his heart;
And a field of white, on a silver night,
Lends words a witching art.

Over a cold, bleak field we drove
Our faltering snowshoes fast;
Until we came to a singing grove,
Like a blanket before the blast.
And here the fir did lazily stir:
And the dead leaf, in its woe,
Pled from the tree that the wind might free
Its hand and let it go:—
Pled with the wind to let it find
A brother beneath the snow.
And I could not help comparing, then,
That leaf's one piteous song

To the cry of women, the cry of men,
Who linger in life too long.
Oh! a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
Brings thoughts like these in throng.
We trailed a path that pierced the wood
Like a fallen wisp of thread.
And under a great pine bough we stood,
'Till it poured a blessing from overhead.
There's the heart of a bird, I've often heard,
Imprisoned within the pine;
For slowly it lifts long arms and sings—
Long ebon arms like the raven's wings—
But the grasping root too tightly clings;
And the earth cries: "Thou art mine."
Who lists to the pine's half-whispered lines
In speech will gentler grow.
And he will soon less harshly tread
Who hears furred feet on snow.
And he who looks across long plains,
While winter winds do blow,
A keener broader vision gains
Than he who looks through window panes,
And haunts four walls, I know.
O thoughts like these ride on the breeze,
And pierce at will the mind,
On a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
And music in the wind.
There are stories writ on the cold, white snow,
Where velvet feet have pressed,

More tersely told than the pen's long flow;
More eloquently expressed.
So, when ahead a rabbit sped,
And a fox's dainty mark
Told forage tales on the field's white spread,
And a feast when skies were dark,
We had better fun than the timid one
Who chose of an indoor ease,
And breathed of a modern's sickly tales,
Instead of the balsam breeze.

A field of white is a cheerless sight
With never a touch of red;
So, high on the slope of a wooded height,
Where the lithe young pines are bred,
We lifted the tongue of a tiny flame
And it whispered to branches dry;
And, all in a moment, the answer came
In a voice that pierced the sky.

Yea, all in a moment the answer came;
And we circled the yellow fire.
And we hurled on twigs, with unerring aim,
While the long red tongue grew higher.
Then we sang a rugged Northern tune,
With action in every note;
No southern song with its dreamy rune,
But an air that swelled the throat;
Yea, an air our sires had handed down
Like an heirloom of the mind.

And we blessed the shoes that had left the town
So many leagues behind.

O many a pair who tramped that night
Took a longer trip together.

And many a pair, who braved that cold,
Walked down with life to her gate of gold,
Through varied leagues of weather.

For a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
Doth tie full many a tether.

I have walked, since then, the floors of a king;
But they were marble to that white floor.

I have listened to hosts of a chorus sing;
But those pines held music that I loved more.

I have seen the flash of a thousand arcs,
And the city's cruel white glare;

But that anvil moon, with her countless sparks
Was infinitely more fair:

The moon which, on that winter's night,
Looked down through the guiltless air.

When you're tired of the dance hall's hurry,
When you're cloyed with vaudeville jokes;

When you're heartily sick of bloodless girls
Looking languid in opera cloaks;

Come out with me, where the heart beats free,
And scorning conventional pride,

Try a snowshoe tramp, with a moon for lamp,
And a sweet girl at your side.

Montreal, 1908.

WHOM SHALL MY HEART CONDEMN?

HERE are a few lines in defense declaimed
For them, the blind of soul, the spirit maimed;
The human tragedies who thread our strife;
The debris cast upon the sea of life.
They through all time have tangled His design;
Have marched discordant to the rhythmic line.
Not all the stars that, falling, scar the cheek
Of night, bound in one avalanche, could speak
To them of beauty. Not all music wrung
From the white lips of waters shoreward flung,
Could rouse their souls with harmonies divine.
For them no rose refines her odorous breath;
No king or priest unrolls his shibboleth;
No galaxy of planets nightly shine.
O Folly! place thy mark upon the task
That binds the eye and cries, "See through the mask."
Rather than bid the night unfold her flowers
Doth Nature lead her to the morning hours.
Rather than ask the waters underground
To sparkle brightly, on a sunless round,
Doth she not lead them out through grassy bowers
And teach them how to bound.
Lord, to such judgment make our verdicts thrall,
And Mercy's foot shall tread our Justice hall.
Whom shall my heart condemn? what law apply
That will have flavor of a judgment just?
So little has been given to some while I

Have been endowed with so divine a trust.
And yet my august soul would shrink in dread
Did I believe an angel judged the dead;
Or held I not the Master knew full well
How subtle was the art to which I fell.
If I then fear such mercy, should not these—
Poor, piteous forms adrift on Life's rough seas—
Dread the untempted judge and his decrees!
Thus saith the Lord: "The judgment seat is mine;
And yet I fill your cup with mercy's wine.
So, likewise, turn to him of weaker will
And his poor measure with thy pity fill."
O Pity! fairest bloom the soul may wear,
Thou art the verdure on the face of earth
Making the rocks to sing and giving birth
To children of the leaves with laughing hair.

How shall I judge? To sin, the silver chord
That tethers me to beauty, with a sword
Must I first cut; must grow forgetful quite
Of eyes that held my morning in their light:
Must drown remembrance of lips red with love,
And eyes, accustomed to the realms above,
Train earthward. Ah! but these; they are not bound
By one small tether to diviner sound.
They sin because 'tis easiest of the arts;
The single gift of birth endowed their hearts.
Then, Lord, as thy good mercy we desire
Let us not fan our hatred into fire
Against our brothers of the Lesser Will;

But rather let us lead them up, until
They hear the higher music that lures on
The climbing soul that goes to meet the dawn.

When thou shalt judge, O monarch of the Bench,
Thy verdict shall two verdicts ever be;
For if thy poor, proud logic turned on thee
'Twould hang thee twice ere sunset, and the trench
You dig for one would hold you both at night.
The petulance of thy sarcastic smile,
Thy thought ungenerous, in Heaven's sight
Is crime more subtle than the steel's cold guile.
He murders, steals, profanes and yet hurls less
At God than thy one act of bitterness.
Thy crime is all thine own but half the State
Had part in his, and urged him to his fate.
Better than halter or electric chair
Were childhood breathing virtue from clean air.
Better at murder should the State convene
And try itself; learn wherefore hath it been
So loveless toward one man that he should feel
The satisfaction of a piece of steel;
Than that it tread on him with mailed heel.

So soft a babe he lay,
All velvet to the touch, upon the bed.
A mother's failures and a father's faults
Filled half his tiny head.
Then Hate came early and stood by him long,
And taught him all the discords of life's song.

And, last of all, the grim law passed his way
And, with coarse fingers, pressed his unshapen head,
Until, within one chamber, Love lay dead.
Then, when he killed that which he might have loved,
Men stood unmoved;
Or at the wretch their maledictions hurled;
Men who were ushered in a welcome world;
Whose cheeks were rounded by a mother's hand;
Who knew the charmed circle's gentle bliss,
The morning kiss,
The velvet praise and musical command.
O, thou just Heaven, how shall these men know;
These men made moral by birth's accident;
Whose lips have never touched the cup of woe;
Whose garments know of neither stain nor rent?
O righteous judge! O twelve good men and true!
So very full of argument are you,
So robed in ancient garments of the Jew,
I fain would now become debative too;
And ask some simple questions: pray, take note:
Should'st thou upon a street in Heaven meet
A man with livid ring about his throat,
(Rope teeth prints sanctioned by thy judgment seat)
Would that to thee make Paradise more sweet?
Dost think the Christ a gibbet chain could see
And not feel shame for uses of a tree!
And who shall do the bloody deed I ask?
And all the Pilates cry; it shall be flung—
The trick that pulls the cord and swells the tongue
And makes devouring lime a mortal's bed—

Upon our hired assassin; he is dead
To that white vision of a soul's distress.
Whirl, busy loom, and weave a coward's dress
For him who wears a hangman as a mask.
On Satan's ears more pleasant sounds ne'er fell
Than that word "Law" when put to such an end.
They dance to music in the depths of Hell
When mortals such a bloody course defend.

Who fells the tree
Must know the branch goes too:
And with the branch the leaves that wave to me,
And twixt whose faces shineth Heaven's blue.
O Lord, these too, these too,
These proud-faced mothers, circled by strong arms,
These sisters, sacrificial of their charms,
Will hang beside him on the cursed tree.
Jesus they killed; and Mary, too, they slew.
John felt the spear that ran the Master through.
Where stops the hand of State? Tell me, I pray,
And I'll correct you on the Judgment Day.

Can they be Christlike who this thing avow?
The blood of Cain is on that nation's brow
Whose justice will such vengeful course allow.
The pulpit, holding up to man this creed,
Will give its message like a broken reed.
The government that burns her dead with lime,
Despite the churchman's poor, absolving rhyme,
Holds nothing but a licensed seat of crime.

Ye imps of Hell ; let your black laughter live.
The pious churchman sends a soul to death,
Saying : "Forgive us Lord as we forgive :"
Old Pharisees of rotten heart and breath.
Laugh, ye black devils, in your caverns laugh ;
And write me out for them an epitaph.
For, if the Lord forgives as they forgave,
What cup of mercy shall their spirits save !
What drop of water shall their thirsting quell
In some black cavern of their deeper Hell !
Weep, ye white angels, in the heavens weep ;
For Love hath been full many a year asleep.

O ye, who cling unto this Old World wrong,
What comfort can ye find in David's song ?
He murdered and, in God's sight, sang the stains
From out his heart. What had a tight rope done
But rob the world of those repentant strains ;
As sweet as ever rose beneath the sun !
Yea, farther I would go and say in truth :
This, life for life, this outworn, tooth for tooth,
Hath crushed full many a singer in his youth.

No more : if in the acres of thy heart
The seed sublime of Mercy is not sown
What rain of words or wind of music blown
Will make their fields to blossom with mine art.
To stone I do not sing : the granite soul,
Should I declaim a thousand years, would still
Cleave to the old, outworn Hebraic scroll,

And lift its loveless arm of steel to kill.
And yet in vain I have not roused my rhyme,
For, in some sweeter, nobler hour of Time,
A mother's eyes shall laugh and children play
Because a poet sang this song to-day.

So little has been given to some; to me
Are borne the rarest gifts of land and sea.

Montreal, November, 1908.

FIRST SONG WITHOUT A NAME

SHE took the best my heart could bring
And feasted for a while;
Nor knew I what a loveless thing
Lay underneath her smile.
And though, to-day, my fond embrace
She scarcely can recall,
The faintest smile that lit her face
Is but a picture gaining grace:
My memory holdeth all

I doubt if she remembers one
Long wistful look of mine.
I sooner could forget the sun
Than how her hair did twine.
Than I no flower gave to the wind
More freely of its soul.
And is it strange, when looks were kind,
A luckless seaman ne'er divined
How shallow was the shoal?

And yet her glances did implore;
Her answers were complete.
If words could carry love they bore
Her spirit to my feet.
Yet now I know the sound I thought
Love's sweet replying tone
Was not the message which I sought
But rather mine own echo caught
Against her heart of stone.

I look back o'er the drifted years,
That lie as cold as snow,
And wonder why my soul endears
The days of long ago.
A thousand warm, red lips are here;
And Beauty's eyes are wet.
And, when the autumn leaves are sere,
I sit beside the fading year
And bid my soul forget.

"Though one so false possess such charms
I will not pine away;
But gladly give to other arms
This child of faithless clay."

These words I spake and thought my heart
Was healed its wound, and then
One, neath my window, touched my heart
With some old aria of lost art,
And oped the wound again.

Montreal, 1909.

THE WHIP-POOR-WILL

SAD Minstrel of the Night's neglected hour;
Strange, unseen, devotee of Loneliness;
In sweet seclusion of some leafy tower
Pleading a witching note of haunted stress.
While other tribes confess
Their secrets at the listing ear of day,
Till night thou waitest thy confessional.
But Mercy died with one last golden ray.
And song of twilight bell.

Mercy is dead—yea fled is that warm sun;
And when thou dost confess, none shall reply.
Thine oft repeated prayer can never run
Down the lost steps of light, to lure that eye
Back to the gloomy sky.
So shalt thou call, and call once more, in vain,
O foolish Virgin of the feathered throng;
Too late to trim thy lamp on sunlit plain,
Or light a happy song.

Limned on a leaden sky, the huddled trees
Stand like the evil dregs in some black drink;
When Erebus invades with chilling breeze,
And stirs this blackness to the cup's high brink.
Where night doth interlink
The solitary children Chaos bore.
And on a hill, in pensive mood, I stand,
Listing thy song waves splash a velvet shore,
Enchanting all the land.

Thou hast one simple song alone to sing—
For never was the varied note thy part;
Never the trill the mocking bird doth fling
Like spray of fountain on the weary heart:
Yet would I count thine Art,
Though flowing through a story oft retold,
Not less than that which rides pretentious song.
For Truth doth ever to one message hold;
While Error chants a throng.

The droning singers of the drowsy eve
O'er their low waves of song hear thy notes swell,
As, o'er the murmur of the waters, grieve
The weary wailings of the mournful bell:
Nor they, nor I, can tell
Which silent copse shall next thy message woo;
More than, when gazing on the skies afar,
Can we tell where, upon the fading blue,
Shall gleam the next cold star.

Oft hath Selene, in the vale of sleep,
Fondling her fair Endymion, as he lay
Pillowed where tearful grasses nightly weep,
Pled with Tacita through thy bowers to stray,
And warn thee lest thy lay
Should rouse her lover from his dreamful bourne.
And angry, often hath she, knowing thou
Dost Phoebus fear, to trick thee it was morn,
Burnished her chariot's prow.

When Eurus drives the first reluctant light,

With all Apollo's pageantry behind—
A dew imbibing cortege—and the Night
Staggers to some black recess, stricken blind,
Full various are the kind

That tune a medley for the exiled king.
And so, doth man not woo his minstrelsy
At flush of power; doth every bard not sing
When Pomp and might pass by?

Greater, I deem, it that attempt to thrill
The hour of gloom with deliquescent call.
Wondrous is it to me, O Whip-poor-will,
That thy most wistful note should brave the pall
Of this Cerberian Hall.
Spirit hast thou of that flower oped at night,
That coral tinting on Atlanta's bed;
Soul of thy soul is Philomel's delight;
Her glory on thy head.

Like thine our noblest utterance hath been
Out-bugled through the hours with shadows fraught
When the warm, pleasant rays of love were lean
The quill of Browning marched through leagues of
thought.
In woof of midnight caught
Did that blind prophet touch his epic chord.
And, by good Severn's lamp, Music's own child
Melted our language, and its liquid poured
For but one heart that smiled.

Fickle is fancy: first to me thy role
Was not unlike that Virgin when her doom,
Heard through the happy door, froze on her soul.
Next, thou the robe of courage did'st assume,
When through increasing gloom
I heard thy song at dusk—Defeat's own hour.
Fancy must play; did pierce thine ebon sphere
Some soldier, broken parcel of lost power,
I doubt not he would hear

Thee calling back to line the craven band
That hushed their songs before the cuirassed dark,
Like some more ardent lover of his land
Who hails back fleeting soldiers to their mark.
Like thine his cry: O hark!
Like is thy note, so fraught with dull Despair.
(Too full already is that gory bed.)
And thou dost call as vainly through night air
As he calls o'er his dead.

To-night again I lie on that green isle—
That magic isle amid the singing reed—
And watch the hills lift up a rugged pile,
Scarred oft with birch, whose silver leaf is freed
Most early: blown the seed
Of vagrant goldenrod across my brow,
Where falling spindrift tames its restless wing,
As life hath tamed my spirit, wherefore now
To nature's brow I cling.

If we, like thee, dear, gentle bird, could sing
 Away our sorrow in the dark, alone,
How soon would every forest hallway ring
 With harmonies that breathed autumnal tone;
And broken oft with moan.
 But we must face the multitude and smile;
Though Anguish leaneth on the heart's strained
 chords;
 And Longing crieth for some lone wood aisle,
And all its peace affords.

Thou were a witness of the sweetest night
 That e'er lit Peri pathways for my feet;
Nor was there ever melody that quite
 So nearly made a paradise complete,
As thy song, wildly sweet.
 Sing on, to-night, dear whip-poor-will, sing on;
That hour returns, and all too swiftly goes
 To pave the path which I shall walk at dawn
With dead leaves of the rose.

Sing on; thy singing keeps the Vestal fires
 Of song aflame when all the hearths are cold;
When Robins leave their blossom-scented lyres
 And mutely wait within the shadow's fold
Dawn riding aureoled.
 And each head dipped in feathers sleeps secure,
Knowing the flame of song, through all the dark,
 In thy sad throat burns bright and sweetly pure.
And from its star hued spark,

When morn comes quickly with her conquest tread,
Shall each light up the ashes of her tune;
Till flame shall leap to flame, and swiftly spread
O'er the lost Kingdom of a Spectral Moon.
Nor shall again thy rune
Be heard till dies the sun's last level ray.
And though I haunt the wood in noonday hours,
Not in the grove, nor on the sunlight way
Shall Music wake thy powers.

Kingston, July, 1909.

TRAPPER ONE AND TRAPPER TWO (Or the Ghost of Ungava)

PART ONE

MOANING branches of the midnight, with your
melancholy rune,
With the mournful, mystic music of your cries;
Wail of late Noyember waters; mocking laughter of
the loon,
That within the arms of desolation dies;
Weave your glamor through my song;
Haunt it at your doleful pleasure,
Till the woodland's wilding throng
Dance upon my page a measure.
Life and song are tired of leisure; let my rune be wild
and strong.
He was Trapper One—the dead man; I am Trapper
Two who write
Of the ghost that came to haunt me through the long
Ungavan night.

Moaning branches of the midnight! Have ye ever
heard them moan
In those wilds that God reserved to shame the soul;
When you've buried a companion and you're in a
world, alone,
Where no echo from a living land can roll?
In the winter's gothic light,
When the sun's a dying ember
And the only joy of night

Is the pleasure you remember
From a merry old December when a comrade's eyes
 were bright,
Have ye ever heard the hemlock, underneath the wist-
 ful sky,
Chill the marrow bones of winter with the sadness of
 her cry?

It is midnight in December as I write these mystic
 lines :

And the burning branch is etching spectral walls.
In the Gordian interlacing of its intricate designs
Pleads a witchery of motion that entralls.
In this cabin's haunt, alone,
Sole companion of my sorrow,
While the pines, in monotone,
Wail to every wind a haro
I am waiting for the morrow, all my courage over-
 thrown;
Fearful of the endless night and the gliding form in
 white
That descends to chill my senses from a wild Ungavan
height.

Softer than an infant's breathing is the music of the
 pines :
When they sing I know how Sound doth reverence
 God.
O'er this life's abundant discord I can hear their mel-
 low lines
As their harpist pave, with broken strings, the sod.

Yet the pine hath lost its power
To renew my fainting spirit:
I, who loved its singing tower,
Draw my cloak and madly fear it.
I could rest but that I hear it wail her sorrow at this
hour:
Wail her sorrow, and his sorrow, as the pine alone
can wail
In the depths of old Ungava, on the boldest trapper's
trail.

Search the symbols faintly crawling o'er this yellow
scroll of birch:
Ride the dipping, curving tremor of my pen.
And the day you find me lifeless, in this cabin, gently
search
For a testament to prove my words to men.
Should they challenge truth you'll find
Foil to parry in a pocket.
When you reach it, pray unwind
Someone's hair within a locket.
Hold it to mine eye's grim socket: I shall see it, dead
and blind.
Would you grant a dead man bliss press it to my lips
to kiss:
Though I'm dead I swear I'll kiss it with a dead man's
sacred kiss.

It was years ago, in Levis—from Quebec a river's
cry—
That two sons of Scotia loved a flower of France.

And they wooed her in the autumn where the forts in
ruin lie
And the scarlet ranks of maple make advance.
But the end of wooing came
With the curving snow in billow;
For a zephyr blew the flame
From the roses on her pillow.
And we laid her neat the willow and the gentle spring-
time came,
Bringing back her thousand roses; but the fairest of
them all
At the bugle cry of April never answered to the call.
But before the color faded from the petal of the rose,
I, who loved her, knew how subtle was the thorn.
When her favor chose the other all the joys of life
arose
And re-clad their forms in sable, most forlorn.
For the maid with fingers fair,
In a lover's hour of leisure,
Granted him a breadth of hair
Which would mate a finger's measure:
Great enough to clasp his pleasure, big enough for my
despair.
Touch thy glass to mine, O comrade, who know sor-
row such as mine:
Legion of the hopeless lovers! drink with me this
bitter wine.
Northward came we in an autumn; Trapper One and
Trapper Two,

To a hut that tamed the wildness with its light.
And we sentinelled the valleys with as treacherous a
crew

As did ever clasp a velvet foot at night.
And we thinned the tribes of fur—
Never touched by brand or tiver—
In a land where not a stir
Woke the slumber of the river
Save the tamarack, ashiver, and the pheasant's startled
whirr.

But the wistful waves of sky saw my comrade droop
and die.
And I closed his lips aquiver with the music of good-
bye.

This is all: I stole his treasure when I crudely formed
his bed

In a scraping, cruel, frozen bit of ground.
And, although I ever loved him as the only link that
led

Back where music of her foot made sacred sound,
Yet the love of her was more
Than the solemn vow I carried.
And though, at his bed, I swore
The sweet locket should be buried
All my good resolves miscarried: and I almost madly
tore

From his throat the silken compact: Life had given
him her breath:
Was I wrong to press my warm lips on the thing he
claimed in death?

I was happy with my comfort though I kept a dead
man's right.

(Could he care, asleep beneath the forest floor?)

I would seek that Ancient City when the springtime's
balmy light

Fell on basking babies through the open door.

But a night when clouds, aflush,

Paled to pink, and amber after,

Laughed a loon, across the hush,

With her revenantie laughter

Rising wild and growing dafter as it wailed above the
rush.

And a warning in her message made me look across
the night

Where I saw the damning spirit in its gleaming robe
of white.

Moving like a light o' lantern o'er the bare cliff's
rugged face:

(Walls of rock so sheer the snow could never cling)

With a melancholy motion, that was spectral in its
grace,

Fled the sprite; if ghost you call a nameless thing.

I had often hurled the boast,

When I made the circle's number,

That a spectre or a ghost

Was a phantasy of slumber;

Or a gentle myth to cumber timid children at the most.

But my boastful lips grew silent and my heart did
wildly thrill

When I first beheld the phantom moving slowly up the hill,

He had said a thing should haunt me if I broke his last request:

But I always scorned his necromantic brain.

Could a wisp of hair and locket, stolen from a lifeless breast,

Have the power to call a spirit back again.

So, in anger, I did cry:

“ ‘Tis my fancy sees the spirit:

To the ghostly ledge I’ll fly:

And, since folly bids me fear it,

I will look not up till near it lest my resolution die.”

But anear the crag I stumbled and the partridge rose in flock:

And a silver elk—the vision—I beheld against the rock.

Soon my rifle soiled that silver with the crimson’s piteous mark:

And the phantom was a legend with its flash.

And I washed the ruddy satin as, at eventide, the dark From the silvern cloud doth wash the scarlet splash.

And I hung the fur on high;

And grew festive o’er the savor,

As the flame, with eager cry,

Freed the haunch’s garish flavor.

Smack of wintergreen for favor: e’en the breezes passing by

Carried through the night its fragrance : such a zest as
might enthuse
E'en the jaded lip of Gothain, lashed beneath the spice's
ruse.

Fool was I : no sprite pays homage to the lucent leap o'
lead.

'Twas a phantom and my brother had not lied.
Not an evening since my feasting but the silver elk
hath fled

Through the darkness with the mark upon its side.

I have prayed a day's respite

But the breezes laugh in answer ;

While the snow in wraith of white

Whirls beside me like a dancer.

And a pale and stately Lancer rides to meet me through
the night.

Brief the season I can brave it for the hours are
strange and cold ;

And my spirit feels the burden of a heart that's grow-
ing old.

PART Two

Moaning branches of the midnight ! He hath
passed beyond their dirge ;

Lying strangely on the foot-forgotten floor :

For the Genius of Creation bade his infant soul emerge
From the womb of Life and creep to Heaven's door.

Does it matter if the call

Comes amidst the fires of Java ;

Or speaks weirdly through the hall
Of the winter-washed Ungava?
Lifted from the creeping lava and the thunders that
 appal,
Through the portal of Uranus, shades of Pompeii shall
 greet
Spirits rising where the snowdrift wraps the pilgrim
 in its sheet.

God creates and man interprets: 'tis interpretation
 fails
When the moan of naked branches does not charm.
Poor that lover, often praiseful of the glowing cheek,
 who hails
Not the beauty of the curving snow of arm.
Uller's wild and wintry shroud,
Barren of the wile of tresses,
With such beauty is endowed
As shall win my soul's caresses
Quickly as the wine that presses through the richest
 summer cloud.
Call me, then, Ungava's poet; for I love her bleak
 despair
More than palms and more than roses which the tropic
 bosoms wear.
O Ungava, wild Ungava! if thy treasured crypt had
 tongue
Half the world, ere this, had tracked the moose's spoor,
Shouting wildly their eurekas where a lavish Hand
 had flung,

Underneath the stammel rock, the yellow lure.
Yet beneath the white star's stare
Thou art lying like a sleeper
On her golden coils of hair;
Ward of silence and the keeper
Of a thousand men's despair;
Who shall deeply delve, and deeper, while the mid-
night beacons flare.
Trappers here shall gain their treasure on the hills
that smoke and croon;
And the dreamer feast forever on the laughter of the
loon.

Moaning branches of the midnight, with your melan-
choly rune,
With the mournful mystic music of your cries,
Sob of late November waters, mocking laughter of
the loon
Or the bittern's doleful wailing ere it dies,
Blow your music through the ear
Of the one who courts these pages.
Let him conjure up the drear
From the storied depths of ages.
And when drowsy o'er the sages bid imagination peer
For a moment on the madness of a lonely trapper's
brain,
On the night he saw the vision with its guilty, crimson
stain.

Toronto, October, 1910.

REED SONGS

1

IN the land of Proven Fact,
High above the hammer's ring,
Kept a soaring skylark pact
With her spirit's blossoming.

Sat the queen, unmoved, below :
Sat her courtiers, one and all,
Marking more the hammer's blow
Than the lyric prophet's call.

Varied was her lilting's art.
Martial-toned, at first, it fell
Till its rune rehearsed a part
Softer than an evening bell.

Had there been a soldier there
Quickly had his pulses stirred
When, upon the vibrant air,
Fled the music of this bird.

Did a poet stray the street,
Beating breast against its walls,
He had kept her message sweet
E'en in Babylonia's halls.

But the Land of Proven Fact
Boasted neither flag nor bard.
Strode alone its level tract
Science, with her hueless shard.

Sat a beggar in the sun,
Frowsed of visage, lean of limb;
In the land the only one
Gaining import of thy hymn.

Three had spared the breasts of Tyre.
One shall save this soulless land:
Look; descending shafts of fire
Upheld by the beggar's hand.

2

Moaning sculptors of the air,
Carving from a dewy globe
Crystal forms the pine shall wear
On her dark, ancestral robe!

Where they work, an open door
Swirls their treasures to the storm.
Some shall find the city's floor:
Others grace the mountain's form.

Does the shapeless mass of snow,
Tortured by a thousand feet,
Rob their glory, do ye know,
Or their craftsmanship defeat?

There's a sister to the gem
Which I humble as I tread,
Keeping pure a diadem
On the mountain's savant head.

Who shall scorn the graver's part,
When the melted street shall run,
Too, must praise alike his art
Where a summit hails the sun.

I, the carver of this line,
Know not whether it shall fall
On the robe of mountain pine
Or the town's dissolvent wall.

3

Comes an ardent sun to woo,
On the valley's couch, the snow.
Though a day his love is true
Grief for him shall overflow.

Dead at night his love shall lie,
Crushed within his warm embrace,
Leaving underneath the sky
Of her beauty not a trace.

Rides a colder sun to greet,
On the higher hills, the maid.
Fondly shall these lovers meet
Through the ages, unafraid.

Passion spends his lustful quest:
Love preserves her heart's desire.
Lean thou lightly on a breast
Lest thine ardor quench its fire.

Lover of my rhythm's rune,
 Best applause of all is thine,
Sitting, museful, at the noon,
 Finger on a favored line.

Others blessed me face to face :
 Called me poet, seer and sage.
Yet I search each hidden place,
 Vainly, for my opened page.

Waters, o'er forgetful sands,
 Wash the play of printed feet :
Yesterday, the rain of hands :
 Now, the dreadful judgment seat.

Blushful culprit I surprise
 Sipping nectar of my pen,
Praise that nestles in thine eyes
 Shall outlive the toasts of men.

Toronto, 1910.

A SONG OF BROTHERHOOD

I, WHO sing this, am of no land:
For though my heart is fondest of one land,
Yet is this fondness truer because I love all lands.
I hate the sin of mine own flesh and blood;
And love the virtues of mine enemy.
I am of England only as England is of truth.
I am of France only as France is virtuous.
I am of Germany only as Germany is clean.
I burned my last sad, prejudice but yesterday:
Now am I free to speak, being of no land.
'Twas no pure fount of pride bade me prefer
A bloated Saxon, heavy with his wine,
To sad-faced Bedouins; fasting and at prayer.
Brother of France, brother of Germany, brother of the
American States,
Brother of Italy, Russia, Iceland and Japan,
Comrade of the most unknown isle,
If thou art true, then, art thou more to me
Than one in mine own kingdom who is false.
In war my sword would urge its gleaming thrust,
With better play, through traitors at my side
Than at true-hearted foes.
I have seen dark-skinned men with great pathetic eyes,
And have cheered coarse, dull, white wretches who slew
them.
And in those days I called myself a patriot.
Now am I patriot to the kind deeds of a Brahmin;
To all that assists the ultimate ends of harmony

In the wild songs of savages; to the good in everything.

My flag is sewn by the fast shuttle of feet
Wherever, and whenever, good Samaritans tread the highway.

My National Anthem is the Silence of Universal Peace.
I love the sound of the breaking of bread, in India,
Better, far better, than the sob of waves
That kiss iron keels at Cowes.

I am more of America than I am of Canada:
I am more of the World than I am of America:
I am more of the Universe than I am of the World.
No creed have I nor know I any law that is evil.

I am one of the hosts of Barbary;
And even the clouds oppress my expansion of soul.
If I were given three things to damn
I would damn creed three times.

If I were given three more things to damn
I would damn creed three more times.
For had a creed been damned in India's dawn
The Ganges ne'er had known its human cry.
And O, the blue eyed Irish, but for creed,
Would lead the march of nations. You have asked:
When will come Brotherhood? When will come the Christ?

And I reply: not until creeds are one
With the vain dust of their own temples.

The greatest teacher is he who comes both to learn and to teach.

Go Methodist, or Baptist, into Burma; say:

"I come, my brown-skinned brother to learn from thee
All that thou hast of truth: I come to give
All that I know of Good."
Strange, when the garnishments are torn away,
How like the Gods of other nations are
Unto my God.

I would build high a fire,
Whose tongue would sear the silver on the stars;
And for my fuel would gather scripts of creeds,
Worm eaten altars, and the robes of priests,
And treaty parchments brown, and pitiless swords,
And all that militates against the Brotherhood.
And to the warmth would I call Esquimaux,
And Hottentots, and Englanders, and Arabs:
And there, while eyes grew eloquent and tongues mute,
I would assemble all the hosts of Barbary.

Listen to me, O warring tribes of Earth:
I am no longer of any land or of any creed.
I am a patriot to the kind deeds of a Brahmin,
To the good impulse of the lowest-scaled Pagan.
So would'st thou join me, comrade, test thy heart;
And if those chambers harbor no malice;
And if thou hast swept them clean of prejudice;
And if thou art ready to slay a creed at God's com-
mand—
Even a creed which thou lovest as Abraham loved
Isaac—
Then, the hosts of Barbary await thy company.

Toronto, December, 1911.

BARBARY

“**W**HAT is your creed?” cried the census man;
And I answered: I have none:
I am one of the hosts of Barbary
Who worship beneath the sun.
We have temples aflame with flowers;
And wearing the clouds their towers.
And the seven days are the hymns of praise
We sing to the Holy One.

The creed hath need of a belfry bell
To summon the knee to prayer.
But we, of the Hosts of Barbary,
Are called by the love we bear.
O, we ride through the morning dews
To gird on the Master’s shoes.
And we wait by night, while the stars burn white,
The soul of His smile to share.

Ten falsehoods nailed to a truth have ye;
And a long cathedral aisle.
And we, of the Hosts of Barbary,
Stand out on the hills and smile.
But we garner your truthful word
And add it to one we heard,
From a pagan band, somewhere in a land
By the Ganges or the Nile.

Ye feed your souls on a worn-out scroll,
And chain them to chapel walls;

Until they have never a thought of God
 Away from their pews and stalls.
But we, whom your numbers despise,
 Are pastured on cloudless skies;
For our souls have found that Holy Ground
 Is ever where Beauty calls.

And ye are bound to a rule and law
 Upheld by a chant and charn.
But we are fed from the veins of flowers
 That redden an upland's arm.
O, in Barbary fair we grow
 A lily as white as snow;
And a damask rose to welcome those
 Why fly from a creed's alarm.

So go to him who would know thy creed
 And say to him: "None have I:
I have joined the Hosts of Barbary
 Who worship beneath the sky."
For a day, when the last creed's power
 Goes down with her temple's tower,
From a granite peak, shall the great God speak;
 And Barbary's hosts pass by.

Toronto, October, 1911.

THE SONG OF THE SKATE

CAN that slim violin which hangs so mutely on
my wall

Forget those mystic melodies that once played
round its heart?

Or can this organ, clad in dust, declare beyond recall
The passion of those symphonies that woke its choric
art

Or can this wistful pair of skates, that lie upon my
floor,

Lose recollection of the foot that held them once in
flight?

More eloquent than lip of man, they call me and im-
plore

I bring the foot of Margaret to free them for to-night.

There's many a witching winter's tale this hallowed
steel could tell—

Of cheeks aflush, and hearts athrob, and gentle words
that fell

As softly on the waiting ear as snowflakes on the snow,
As sweet as music in the pine when Auster's cohorts
blow,

And sometimes in the dreaming hour, when Twilight
melts the lines

That Winter etched against the sky, and breaks within
the pines

The bottled wine of darkness—whose bubbles are the
stars:

And nymphs in every leafless tree tune softly their guitars;
In fancy I can hear a voice—the spirit of these skates—
Complaining of my Margaret, and asking why she waits.
“For five long years, and patiently, we’ve lain upon the floor,
And listened for her loving voice to enter at the door.”

Five years ago—five lonesome years; I well recall the night:
Your blades were keen as winter’s breath; your sides were shining bright.
Yea, well do I recall the night; “I’ll keep your skates,” I said,
“To-morrow night again our feet the river’s glass shall wed.”
“All right, again to-morrow night,” ’twas bliss to hear her speak:
I never saw a brighter eye nor such a roseate cheek.
And when I laid my skates away my heart was free of fears:
But there, upon the floor, they lie; and I can count the years.

Dear little maid! the morrow came and burned its golden ray.
You strove to rise at early morn, and oft throughout the day.

And, when the moon and stars revealed the burnished
fields of night,
Your heart beat like a captured bird: it was a woeful
sight.
And then we moved your bed to where it overlooked
the snow;
But, hour by hour, you dreamed the winds were calling
you to go.
Dear little maid! the morrow passed, and many morns
as well.
The bloodroot came in snowy hood and sang the
winter's knell.
The violets brushed aside old leaves, as maidens, when
they rise
From sleeping, brush away the locks that wander o'er
their eyes.
The lilies trooped in early June, and through the sum-
mer hours
The buttercup rode herald of a stronger race of
flowers.
The aster came, and lingered, 'till 'twas buried in the
snow;
And then, again, you heard the fields
A-calling you to go.
At night the merry laughter pealed; the moonbeams
fired the snow;
And every light
That blessed the night
Did bid you rise and go:

Did bid you rise and follow fast—ah! years have
passed since then;
And yet across the hills to-night I heard that call again.

She lay upon that bed a year: I saw her every day.
And never did a frown across her patient features
stray.

The river ran before her door: I skated to and fro;
And from her window she would look to see me come
and go.

And once I came in early March and found her pillow
bare:
I called her name, her mother's; no living soul was
there.

And then, far down the river where runs the current
strong,

I saw, upon the flaming ice, men gathered in a throng.
And when I reached the fatal spot I helped them draw
above

The raven river's ebon depths the maiden of my love.
And then they told me how she strayed across the ice
and snow;

And how, all night, she dreamed the winds were call-
ing her to go.

Ah! there are rows of polished skates within the shin-
ing store;

But none so dear to me as those that lie upon my floor.
I look beneath their rust and see the gleaming steel of
old,

As one through clouds, at eventide, may see the morrow's gold.
And so the years have taught my heart the precious things of earth
Are those which Babylonian scorn doth hold of little worth.
The highest tower that ever pierced the moving breast of sky
Is valued in commercial phrase and fair exchange will buy.
But there are toys with broken wheels, once held by baby hands,
More precious than the pearl that sleeps in white Ceylonian sands.
Hast thou no treasure in thy breast? Look through her treasure trove—
The little garden where thy soul delighteth oft to rove—
And thou shalt find an hundred things men could not tear from thee
If, at thy feet, were cast the wealth of India's coral sea.
So, is it strange, when moonlight melts the stars within her wine,
When nights are cold, and at my door is heard the grieving pine,
That I unto my treasure-trove, with heavy heart, should stray,
And borrow, from the files of Time, a dream of yesterday.

They say, down on at river now, when winter breezes
blow,
Her spirit rides upon the wind which called her long
ago.
And when the biting sleet doth blind
And moanings haunt the snow,
They say her voice is calling
For you and me to go.
And when the winds are falling
It pleadeth sad and low,
As it hath pled for five long years in this same moaning
hall.
And, soon or late,
We turn the gate
And answer to the call.

Montreal, 1911.

THE WAKING THOUGHT

CLEANSE Thou, O God, the roadways of my
mind,
Each night, when traffic ceases, I do pray;
That when I waken the clean morn may find
No debris from my sins of yesterday.
Send me one thought of Thine when first mine eyes
Open with flowers unto the sweet sunrise;
And this one thought will draw, throughout the day,
Innumerable thoughts its way—
All children pure, drawn hither by this light;
Drawn hither as that star,
Which Thou dost place against the dusking blue,
Draws from afar
A countless host of its own silver hue,
Arrayed in borrowed garments, pure and white.
Let me on this thought look, when I awake,
As the poor, sick eyes first take
A look at roses, leaning o'er the bed—
Roses, still wet with dew,
Or tears, that almost seem to speak
And plead with their lost sisters to mount through
The snows that lie upon the withered cheek.
By this first flower will all my hours be led:
I would not have Thee pave the path I tread,
Or lift the stones where gentler feet have bled.
Cleanse Thou, O God, is all I ask, and set
My first look on the modest violet.

Should some foul bird

Slay the first robin, and usurp its place,
I doubt so soon would we behold spring's face.
The flower had never stirred
From its moist bed,
Had never lifted to the sun its uncrowned head,
If that brave bird had failed to usher forth
And sing of southern woodlands to the north.
Then speak, O God, to me,
When first I wake at morn; and give I pray
A single thought of Thee
To shepherd all my fancies of the day.

And when the evening shadows softly creep
Over the earth, this shepherd, ere I sleep,
Will bring to Thee, for sacrifice, my sheep.

Toronto, April, 1911.

OTUS AND RISMEL

A ballade of the long sea lanes.

I'LL sing of Love an hundred songs;
For there's an endless store.
I'll sing of Love till the listening stars
Shall crowd the ocean floor.
And then I'll sing again of Love
And then of Love once more.

Here is the riddle; here the key:
Uncoil the silken mesh.
For Otus is a human soul
And Rismel is the flesh.
And tho my theme is the age's dream
Its heart is young and fresh.

Otus quaffed white flame of sun
That gilded Gramard's noon.
But Rismel breathed where the cold weed wretched
Round Triton's heavy shoon.
Rismel dwelt on the lone sea veldt
And wept for the round, red moon.

It is a name that pours like wine:
"Rismel, Rismel, Rismel."
Whenever the word three times was heard,
An answer—low and dismal—
Moaned under the walls of sobbing halls,
In sea arcades abysmal.

Rismel, now, by the light of moon,
Doth Gramard's glory wear.
And Otus knows where the whitest rose
Distils its fragrance rare.
And Otus goes with the whitest rose
And binds it in her hair.

The sea-gull rests on Gramard's shore
And mends her broken wing.
And waters, dumb, from caverns come
To Gramard's cliffs, and sing.
So ride with me to Gramard's sea,
And all your dead loves bring.

Yea, bring your dead loves in your arms,
And I will kiss their brows.
And they shall walk with thee at morn,
And mend their broken vows.
And the merry breeze shall bid the seas
Laugh over sunken prows.

More graves than one each man shall dig;
(A sexton's trade we ply.)
For every twilight spreads a grave
Where some dead love doth lie—
Some poor and pitiful dead love
That, buried, does not die.

Moving like shuttles over the deep—
Through broken masts and spars—

The dolphins sew the rents of woe
Where storm-gods smote the bars.
And the low, brown tide that floods my song
Unrolls a script of stars.

Otus quaffs white flame of sun
From flask of Gramard's noon.
But Rismel sits where the sunbeam knits
Gold robes for Gramard's dune.
Nor shall she ever slip back to sea
And weep for the round, red moon.

This is a tale of hidden things
Which Love, alone, may find—
A tale that sinks in the sad sea-wave,
And mounts in the soft night wind:
A tale that rides on the star-flecked tides
That under the cliffs grow blind.

II

The graceful green, in grenadine,
Danced well to Otus' flute.
And where his reed flung winged seed
Her furrows bore quick fruit:
For countless fish thrust through the sea,
Like silver grass in shoot.

And one strange fish among the hosts
Had large and human eyes.
And every night it came and basked
Beneath the velvet skies.

And every night it stayed its flight
Till Arcturus would rise.

Love binds with silk; and then with hemp;
And then with iron thong.
And Otus grew to love those eyes
And they to love his song.
And every eve his flute would grieve
Above the silver throng.

The perfumed night called from the height
That pierced her silver sails—
“An hundred maids, with amorous braids,
Dance now through Gramard’s dales:
Why waste thy song on a motley throng
In slimy fins and scales?

“I’ll stem thy wounded flow of heart
With wealth of woman’s hair.
I’ll light thy soul with woman’s eyes;
And rid thee of despair.”
But Otus cried, “My only joys
Are those the fish may share.

“And there’s a hand in Gramard’s land
For every lonesome maid.
And there are flowers in Gramard’s bowers
For every soul dismayed.
But never a flute, save mine, can lure
The tribes of the deep sea shade.”

Love binds with silk; and then with hemp;
And then with iron band.
And then comes Fate and, soon or late,
Unwinds each precious strand:
And then the hours that promised flowers
Bring only wastes of sand.

One evening Otus missed the eyes
That gazed with human fears:
Nor did they come the next, nor yet
Throughout the weary years.
And so he wandered, desolate,
Mid Gramard's dunes and meres.

And then at last a troubled voice
Assailed him in a dream—
“And didst thou love the fins and scales,
Or what did human seem?”
And Otus answered, “I did love
A living soul, I deem.”

So touched to pity by the look
The tender minstrel bore,
The spirit cried, “The fish shall bide
To-morrow at thy door;
If thou but call from Gramard's wall,
Rismel, three times, no more.”

From Gramard's cliff did Otus cry
“Rismel, Rismel, Rismel.”
And after the word three times was heard,
An answer, low and dismal,

Moaned under the walls of sobbing halls,
In sea arcades abysmal.

And soon the mystic sea unrolled
Her heaving portals wide:
And near the shore, where oft of yore
The fish was wont to bide,
A mermaid, swaying a thousand stars,
Lay pillow'd on the tide.

And then, as Otus roused his flute
With lilt of ancient tunes,
Her wistful eyes looked with surprise
On Gramard's furrowed dunes—
To her their glow did seem to flow
From old, familiar moons.

“Art thou the fish?” and Rismel said
“A mermaid was I born:
And yet I knew the sky was blue,
Ere Neptune's robe was torn:
And yet I knew the sky was blue,
And Gramard's dunes forlorn.

“When in the songless caves I lay
My soul yearned for a thing.
And what it yearned I only learned
An hour your flute did sing—
An hour your flute obeyed the mute,
White fingers of her king.”

Then Otus played with madder art
Than ever man did play;
And drew from caverns of his heart
An old and doleful lay;
And lit the dole of its grieving soul
On Dian's tapered way.

And Rismel rose from out the sea,
As ships lift in the gale:
So far she rose the gleaming sun
Revealed the fin and scale:
Which seen, once more, the sea's torn floor
She pierced, with hopeless wail.

Nine days and nights on Gramard's shores
Did Otus' spirit bleed.
Nine days his woe did sadly flow
Through caverns of his reed.
But for nine long days the secret sea
Bore only the wayward weed.

And then one night the silver light,
That flooded to the West,
Unbared, upon the tearful wave,
The mermaid's dead, cold breast:
Like drifted snow her flesh did show
Above the billows crest.

Her hair did hold a stifling fold
Of sea-wave in its lair.
And wide her eyes were to the skies—
Her life's last thought lay there—

(It was a thought that she had caught
From grottoes of despair.)

And Otus drew her to the sands,
And made her last, cold bed.
And the stars crept low in heaven, as though
They honored, too, the dead.
And the sun did surely weep all night;
For the lids of Dawn were red.

III

For twenty years the lonesome meres
Claimed Otus as their child.
They heard each lay his flute did play
When summer skies were mild:
And they heard his cry when the leaden sky
Raged, like a thing defiled.

Who watcheth long shall hear the song
The glad home-coming sing.
Who liveth well shall come to dwell
In palace of the king.
And what are fears, that thread the years,
To joys a day may bring.

And well I know the ancient woe
Shall come to me again:
Yet it shall wear a gentler air,
And grant me less of pain.
But the joys I buried shall return
In tenfold, like the grain.

The vernal clover hath three tongues
To drink the golden light.
And rule of three binds land and sea,
In Morning, Noon, and Night.
And through the three of Trinity
Doth God assert His might.

And three great days to Otus came;
As three come to us all—
The day the wondrous fish arose
To hear his flute's strange call;
And the hour the mermaid left her bower
Under the sad sea wall.

And on the third, and greatest day,
He walked on Gramard's hill:
And while his thoughts were on that love
The years could never kill,
A laugh rode on the rippling air
Like a spring-awakened rill.

And Otus stilled his flute, and cried;
"Rismel, Rismel, Rismel."
And though the word three times was heard,
No answer, low and dismal,
Moaned under the walls of sobbing halls,
In sea arcades abysmal.

But at his side a maiden stood;
And she was tall and fair:
And she was crowned with crimson hood
That partly hid her hair.

And the deeps of seas were in her eyes;
And Rismel's soul lay there.

Who watcheth long shall hear the song
The glad home-comers sing.

Who liveth well shall come to dwell
In palace of the king.

And what are all the woes of Time
To joys a day may bring!

The years bridge chasms deep and wide:
They bridge them span by span.

And bolt, and thong, and tier are strong;
And true the Builder's plan.

And where the long, white arches end
Stands Christ, the Son of Man.

IV

Rismel is mermaid now no more;
And the sea forsakes my tale.
And so I tell of the chiming bell,
And the mists of wedding veil:
And of children sweet, who bathe their feet
Where the blossoms drift the dale.

This is a tale of hidden things,
Which Love, alone, can find—
A tale that sinks in the sad sea wave,
And mounts in the soft night wind;
A tale that rides on the star-flecked tides,
That, under the cliffs, grow blind.

Who reads this tale and still doth mourn
For suns gone down the West,
Is as a woman who doth press
A dead babe to her breast,
While at her gate the living wait
And weep to be caressed.

More graves than one each man shall dig;
(“A sexton’s trade we ply.”)
For every twilight spreads a grave
Where some dead love doth lie—
Some poor and pitiful dead love
That, buried, does not die.

And only shall these loves awake
When Thanatos rides by.
So bid the mourners all disperse;
And dry thine own sad eye:
For the wisp of clay that rides away
Is scarcely worth a sigh.

v

There was a stir, like gossamer,
When Rismel slipt to sea.
And with a stir, like gossamer,
The deeps shall welcome me:
But at Gramard’s gates the Bridegroom waits;
And His words shall make me free.

Toronto, January, 1912.

THE SONG OF THE PRAIRIE LAND

THEY tell of the level sea
And the wind rebukes their word.
I sing of the long and level plain
Which never a storm hath stirred.
I sing of the patient plain;
That drank of the sun and rain
A thousand years, by the burning spheres,
To nourish this wisp of grain.

I sing of the honest plain
Where nothing doth lie concealed:
Where never a branch doth raise her arm;
Or never a leaf her shield.
Where never a lordly pine
Breaks in on the endless line;
Or the silver flakes of a poplar takes
The strength from the sun's white wine.

The child of the dancing leaf,
Whose laughter sweetens the earth,
Doth never lure, on the barren moor,
The soul, with her winsome mirth.
And the wistful sound I hear
Sweep over the spaces drear
Is the human dole of a childless soul
That mourns in a yearning year.

Let the guilty man depart:
For no cover here shall hide

His conscious brow from the lights that plough
Through the midnight's mystic tide.
For the plain no mantle hath
To lessen the strong sun's wrath:
And the tranquil eye of the searching sky
Is ever upon your path.

I'll walk with the winds to-night;
And under the burnished moon
Shall the white night wake a silver lake
Where the rolling grasses croon.
Shall waken a silken crest
That swings to the night-bird's breast
As the blue waves swing to the sea-gull's wing
When the gallant wind blows west.

Ah! easy to hide from truth
In the city's haunted hole.
But you cannot hide, on the prairies wide,
Where the winds uncloak the soul.
Where the dawn hath pure delight;
And the stars are clean and white;
And sweet and clean is the floor of green
That washes the feet of Night.

Who dwells with me on the Plain
Shall never see spire or bell.
But he too shall miss the traitor's kiss
And the force that drags to Hell.
And what if the coyotes howl
When the black night draws her cowl!

They have gentler glands than the human bands
That under the arc lamps prowl.

And ours is a creedless land,
Far-flung from a script's commands.

But we sometimes think at the cold night's brink
Of the wounded Master's hands.

Yea, often at eventide,
Our souls through the gloom have cried
For a Guiding Light through the awful night
That sleeps at the hermit's side.

I opened my cabin door;
And the starry hosts were gone.
And I knew that God hath gathered their sparks
To kindle the flame of dawn:
To kindle a new, white sun
That over the sward should run,
And drink new hope, on the greening slope,
From the dewcups one by one.

Ah! here is the soul's true sphere:
And here is the mind's true girth.
If I could bring, on the swallow's wing,
The sorrowful hosts of earth,
To sit in this vacant room,
And spin on the wind's fair loom,
What golden bands would their spectral hands
Weave over the wraith of Doom.

For there is a wraith of Doom
That wanders the crowded street.

A heart of care is his pleasant lair,
And a soul his judgment seat.
He comes in a robe of gray,
And stands in the sunbeam's way.
And a blaze of rings, from an hundred kings,
He wears on his hands to-day.

I loosed me a steed last night,
And plunged in the doleful dusk.
And under the sky I heard no cry
Save that of the widowed husk;
Or a wolf-wail, long and low,
That came with a blare of snow;
And I rode all night, with a mad delight,
'Till I met the dawn, aglow.

"Strange fool!" cry the men of gold,
"For what could thy wild ride win?
Why woo the woe of the winds that blow
When the fire burns bright within?"
And I said to the men of gold:
"My heart could a tale unfold
Of the truths we learn when the wild winds yearn,
And the kiss of night grows cold."

So, press on the spurs with me
And drink of a freeman's joys,
In the endless land, where the gophers stand
With a military poise.
And no more will life seem sweet

On the yellow, flaming street—
A painted shrew, with a changeless hue,
And a heart that loves deceit.

And this is the Prairie Song
As it came from out my heart.
And the winds that moan are its undertone;
And the sullen sky its art.
And only the craven man,
With his rhyming finger span,
Shall sulk and whine at my stinging line
Or rail at its planless plan.

But there is a king whose soul
Hath grown to the Prairie's girth;
Whose heart delights in the Northern Lights,
On the borderlands of earth.
And when sunset pours her wine,
At the weary day's decline,
I shall see him stand in the "Unknown Land"
And his lips shall wear my line.

Winnipeg, February, 1913.

PAULINE JOHNSON

She sleeps betwixt the mountains and the sea,
In that great Abbey of the setting sun:
A Princess, Poet, Woman, three in one;
And fine in every measure of the three.
And when we needed most her tragic plea
Against ignoble summits we had won,
While yet her muse was warm, her lyric young,
She passed to realms of purer poesy.
To-night she walks a trail past Lillooet:
Past wood and stream; yea, past the Dawn's white fire.
And now the craft on Shadow River fret
For one small blade that led their mystic choir.
But nevermore will Night's responsive strings
Awaken to the "Song her Paddle Sings."

Regina, March, 1913.

THE HAUNT OF A LOST LOVE

I DREW a marsh of solemn gray;
And over it a heron flew;
It was a sullen autumn day
When that sad marsh I drew.
But, over all the wistful waste,
A spirit seemed to ride above.
And someone bade me call the scene:
"The Haunt of a Lost Love."

I turned from solemn meres to gay
And dancing troops of summer flowers.
I etched the mountains and the play
Of light about their towers.
And, though I warmed my brush's flow
In fern and flower and turtle-dove,
A stranger passed and wrote below:
"The Haunt of a Lost Love."

What matter if I limn a gnome
Amid the gloom of Druid trees;
Or branches breaking into foam
Of blossom on the breeze;
Or debris of the storm that floats
In black and broken clouds above!
Since all who come to view shall say,
"Whether I paint the grave or gay:
"His lost love passed along this way."

Regina, February, 1913.

AT THE FORD

WHO now shall fear to journey where the feet
Of all our noble dead have ferried forth?
The solemn air that fans the tragic ford
Is sweet with their remembrance. They have gone
To light the temples of a fading star
Against our lonely passing. Warm shall be
The waves we breast upon our journey's end
With touches of their bosoms; and the flowers
We laid upon their biers shall float to us
In the sad current's drifting. We have learned
From them the grandeur of farewells and all
The majesty of parting; for they went
From warmth to winter with their almond locks
Held high and nobly in the breeze. What man
Shall fear to follow their undaunted souls?

Alone, the first who died, entwined no hand
To lift him from the current's heavy play.
All, all the rest of that unceasing line
Have heard the numbers of our last adieus
Swoon in the song of welcome that unrolled
Its low andante on the farther shore.
The weeping Rachael saw her children blow
Down to the mystic water's edge and drift
Like petals from one flower upon the stream:
Nor ever feared the journey from that hour.
O frost, that wakes the fire within the blood,
O night, that rears the rosebud of the dawn,

Teach me how foolish is the fear of Death:
Whose colder frost shall burn a purer fire;
Whose darker night shall hood a clearer day.
Teach me until I know that every vale
Is but the prelude of some mountain peak
That waits my soul's approach: then shall I gain,
From all the sorrow that attendeth man,
As he departs our day, a feeble gauge
To measure up the glory that enfolds
His destination's temple. In the fall
Of stars, that never may return, we find
No grievous passing but a flame that burns
The last white fuel of Hope. In all our woe,
Our cup of tears, the bandage of our pain,
(That crushes out the soul) I see that train
Of sad, attendant figures which preludes
All resurrection. In the sightless ground
What sabbings burst the yellow kernel's heart;
What anguish frees its spirit! On the morn
What echoes of that hour enchant the winds,
That blow from Ceres' temple, with the cry
Of dancing corn. Great Sower of the World!
I lie like a soft kernel in Thine hand;
With more intent upon the harvest fields
That wave beyond the tomb than on that hour
My flesh shall keep her vigil in the dark
And cheerless caverns of the grave.

Pale Death!

I go with thee as one who gaily rides
Through shadows to the dawn; as one who dips

For sweet refreshment in the sea, and leaves
The weary dust of highways on her floor.
It is not mine to sadly ruminate
About the chilling waves. Rather would I
Let my dull eyes grow large and luminous
To seek the daring pathway where the morn
Doth tread the cleaner stars; where light doth clothe
The naked horde, cast up by Lethe's stream,
In raiment fit to meet the Court and King.

Claresholm, Alta., May, 1913.

THE ROSE AND THE WILDFLOWER

H AVE ye ever picked berries, O ye Englander, in
a wild and towsy lair,
At an hour when the dew hath blushes from
the dawn's first rosy stare?

Have ye ever heard that ancient cry of "Let there be
light, be light"

Sound over an unknown kingdom at the crimson
end of night!

If ye never have let your critic pen touch not the verse
I bear;

For the crags of Rousseau shall not smoothe to whim
your London air.

I have quaffed health with the berryman as the dawn
washed up the sun.

And the wine I drew was rare I knew; else why had
the cobwebs spun.

Red, robust wine in a cluster held—so red that it
seemed the dew

Had captured the crimson kiss of morn and thrilled
with it through and through.

Have ye ever torn, O critic man, your soft, white hands
on a thorn?

Then you'll tear them if you touch these lines that
deep in the wilds were born.

I am of the rock's strong vigor: I am of the leaf's
unrest:

I am the liege of the silent towers and I am the
royal guest.
I have dreamed my nights in a droning hall where a
star leaned on a tree,
In a land where a new desire hath taught old
Freedom to be free.
And if the sting of your critic's tongue shall leap at
the song I bring
I doubt if the waves of Rousseau shall thereupon
cease to sing.

We never shall culture a wreath of roses to vie with
your England's own,
Where, high on the cliffs of Devon, a garden of
bloom is blown.
But the flowers we nurse on our northern crags shall
lean on the world's white breast
With grace as rare as the fairest rose that ever a lip
hath pressed.
In our shadowy halls the whitethroat calls and, if you
dislike his rote,
Think you that he'll fly over Surrey and study the
skylark's note.

The reverend word is on our lips and we thrill at the
song of Keats.
There isn't a man in all our land to sit in your
Mighty's seats.
But there isn't a man in all your land can swing on
the giant limb

Held by the pine to nurse the line which the northern bards shall hymn.
There's an even flow of omnibus that tides down your Regent Street;
But you cannot tame our daring streams to run with its conquered feet.

I am a lover of things unloved: for the virgin kiss I yearn.
And my lady fair is an unwooed lair that pillows my head with fern.
The mosses wait all day for my touch and the crags yearn for my cry
To give release to the imprisoned sounds that deep in their caverns lie.
And the granite cliffs within my song shall answer the mocking hue
Of every don of the vassaled verse who sneers at my rugged crew.

Out of the North came battlemen who harried the Southern's rest.
And out of the North will come great bards, in their savage garments drest.
For who stands face to the white-winged storm hath a different tale to tell
Than he who sits in a tent of thyme and lists to the vesper bell.
I've brought you a wreath of wildflowers and, if your fair London whines,

I'll sit on the rocks of Rousseau and chant to a sea of pines.

Have ye ever troubled the stars, O Englander, that lie in a blue lake's sleep,

With a blade whose touch is a woman's lip, whose power is a panther's leap?

Have ye ever stood at the end of things and the edge of the things to be,

In a land where a new desire hath taught old freedom to be free?

If ye never have, read on, read on; for I to the North belong.

And the stars that glow in Rousseau's deeps are shining throughout my song.

Claresholm, Alta., April, 1913.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

OVER the Great Divide they come to-day;
A mighty human stream of sturdy tone;
A stream whose robust flood shall wash away
The forest monarch from her ancient throne.

Here is a land with measure like the sea :

An Eden for a giant race of men :
Columbia of the Briton, great and free !
Where shall we look upon her kind again ?

The long, deep sleep is over ; now her limbs
Move in the vigor of the sun's incline.

Her people shall grow like her, and their hymns
Shall breathe a solemn beauty from her pine.

Their harness now is on the daring stream ;
Their roads of steel move thund'rous through the
lands ;

And on the stillness of Creation's dream
New harmonies awaken from their hands.

Here Saxon law preserves an ordered state :

Here lordly ways renew the laggard soul.
Who once shall enter through this open gate

May start a fairer chapter in life's scroll.
Here lovers of the dew, and dawn, and flowers,
Who scale the mountains in their daily prayers,
May bind the sheaf of all the coming hours
And walk with Beauty up her altar stairs.

Here hosts shall come from every sluggish clime,
And quaff the cup that nursed the giant tree.

And here shall palsied limbs reclaim from time
The old, sweet hours of early ecstasy.
And here, where now the eagle slowly wheels
Above a foaming torrent, shall leap high
The temples of a city, at whose heels
The lean, swift hounds of Progress long shall cry.

Columbia of the Briton, great and fair;
When shall we look upon thy kind again?
Of all our lands thou art the last to bear
The arch triumphal, for the hosts of men.
From where Elias guards thy virgin gold
To proud Victoria, with her queenly grace,
The morrow's sun shall witness thee unfold
The thousand hidden beauties of thy face.

Great Artist of this canvas, which the day
Doth gaze upon the longest; in thy brush,
And on thy palette, what creative play
Fired this cold torrent with the gloaming's blush.
The prairie lands are God's plain speech; but here
Is writ, in stone, a poem by His hand;
Against whose glory Stratford's daring seer
Might fling his treasures like a grain of sand.

October, 1913.

A SONG TO THE SINGERS

SHOULD you descend the stairway of old Time,
And search the webbed wine-cellars of the years,
The breaking of each vessel of sweet rhyme
Will make most merry music for thine ears.
No time is dead that gave the world a song:
The larger hours were wet with music's flagon;
And half the garlands of the brave belong
To runes that calmed the courage of the dragon.

The clouds that flowed o'er robust Rome have found
Another prop to lean on than her stone.
But in the heart of music still abound
Sweet traces of her tragic poet's tone.
And yonder tower, that crowds the ampler air,
Shall pass away before this rhyming story.
Let those who build arise where eagles dare:
I'll mount, on this white page, to surer glory.

What arrow ever pierced a traitor's crown
That winged not out from some fair singer's heart?
What courage on the ramparts of a town
But fired its vigor with our choric art?
To-morrow one shall ride the steel-lipped way,
Or fold his arms when mast and helm are sinking,
Who wandered by the Muse's rill to-day,
And roused his valor at my fountain drinking.

Vancouver, B.C., December, 1913.

ALONE

THE great ship furrows a silent sea,
 And wakens the blue to flame.
 But at morrowdawn will her track be gone,
 And the waters flow on the same.

The great ship looks with a thousand eyes
 In the blue eye of the bay.
But never a gleam of their golden dream
 Slips down in the sea to stay.

The little cart hath a creaking sound;
 And moves like a thing asleep.
But it leaves a trace, on the road's white face,
 That many a year shall keep.

O tide of leaves, in the moaning eves,
 Wash down through my broken door;
For there's a road in the heart of me
 Where a wheel shall pass no more.

There are kings who yearn for a greater throne,
 And peasants who would be crowned.
But I'd rather the long, white road, alone,
 Than ride in the great ship's sound.

Vancouver, B.C., December, 1913.

A SONG OF BETTER UNDER- STANDING

I SING this song that you may know me better;
That I may know thee better;
And that we two may burn our false idols
At the same altar.

I come first to you,
Young, inland mariner on a sea of flowing grapes,
In purple France:
Shaking the sweet snow from my hardy shoulders
I come to you.
Long has my race, companioned by strong elements,
Misunderstood the liquid nature of your soul.
And you, with the same blindness as mine own,
Have called my silent Northmen cold and passionless.
Let us approach one another, comrade;
Look in mine eyes and I will look in thine;
And that fair light which falls when soul greets soul
Will be the first spark to arouse the fires
Which shall consume our idols.

Your people gave me to drink at the rare founts
Of Moliere, Hugo and Gounod.
My people renewed thy soul of art
With the clear flow of Shakespeare, Wordsworth and
Keats.
A thousand pleasures of the heart and eye
We owe each other.
Upward reaching toward the same white light

Have all our yearnings been.
Only have our idols blinded us through the long, sad
years.
Now the way is open :
Consume fires; flame fiercely;
For an idol does not burn readily,
And this can never be a Song of Better Understanding
Until all our false idols are translated into ashes.

Yesterday I said : "I will go kill a German :
I hate Germans : I hate their diet : I hate their aggressiveness.

So I buckled on my sword and sought out a Teuton.
And soon I found one sitting by the roadside,
And his head was bent in an attitude of profound
thought.

Then I said, "Mine enemy I have come to kill thee."
And he answered quietly, "I will let you slay me
If you will permit my body to fall on the floor of
yonder chapel."

So we journeyed to the chapel and entered its solitude;
But as I prepared my sword he quoted unto me,
In the rich accents of his thoughtful tongue, a song of
Goethe.

His Goethe? nay; my Goethe? nay; our Goethe? yea.
And when I raised my sword I turned, savagely, and
slew

Not him, but one of mine idols—my false idols.
Then from the chapel organ a soft sound crept with
panther tread;

And through the windows of song passed, like a great wind,

All the pent-up passions of the ages. "The Appassionatta," I cried:

His Appassionatta? Nay. My Appassionatta? Nay. Our Appassionatta? Yea.

And I swung my sword more savagely than before, and slew,

Not him, but all of mine idols—my false idols.

And when the last note had folded its head, like a tired child,

In the arms of silence, leaving our hearts, like sea beaches,

White and shining after the tempest has passed beyond, Mine enemy and I sang together the greatest song of man:

The Song of Better Understanding.

And when we parted I said:

"All white men are my brothers: I will slay a white man no more.

Only are the black men mine enemies, and the yellow men.

I will go and kill an African or a man of China."

And soon I found a yellow man sitting by the roadside:

And his head was bent in an attitude of profound thought.

Then I said as before, "Mine enemy I have come to kill thee."

And he answered quietly, "I will let thee slay me

If thou wilt let my body fall on the soft sands of the sea-shore."

"And why the sea-shore?" I said: and he replied unto me:

"There is a star which I love better than all stars;
And if I fall upon the sands my last look will be upon that star."

Then from his lips flowed the wisdom of Confucius.
And my sword fell helpless and I said:

"I loved that star best of all stars in old England;
And I loved that truth of thy seer best of all truths:
Let us sing together;" and we, lovers of the same star,
Locked arms upon the rim of no-man's sea, and sang
"The Song of Better Understanding."

What antagonism to America and her States
Shall override our granite debt to Emerson,
To Lowell, to Poe, to musical Lanier;
To Whitman who blasphemed the god of Technique:
To Whittier whose life was a gentle song!

What prejudice against Italian fury
Is justified when we unbare the page
Of Dante; or when eye and soul regale
In the majestic sweep of Michael Angelo!

I sing this song that you might know me better;
That I might know thee better.

For now is the day at hand when we shall behold
The dust of all our broken idols, our false gods,
Paving the streets where lusty mortals walk
Chanting the hymns of Barbary and her hosts.

O magnificent hosts! I can see them pass and repass,
Singing, in diapason of a universal love,
"The Song of Better Understanding."

Vancouver, December, 1913.

THE MONGREL

“**T**HE West has no place for a poet,” said the corpulent man with a sneer,

As we sat by the fire, out at Harrison Lake, in the spring of the year—

Out at Harrison Springs where the invalids go, for a bibulous spell,

To ease up their bellies on water that smells like the portals of Hell.

“The West has no time for your verses; for what is the rhyme of a song

To souls in the kingdom of action, to men who are rugged and strong.”

And he threw out his chest as he said it, as much as to say: “If you’d see

A real worthy son of the Westland, pray, take a good look over me.”

I had lived among cowboys and miners; I had lived where the loggers pitch camp;

And from Medicine Hat to Vancouver I knew all the land like a tramp.

I had ridden the plains on a broncho; I had panned out the gold in a sluice;

I had eaten the fare of a Pullman and quaffed of the riverman’s juice.

I had watched them rip mountains at Blairmore; I had felt the Chinook at MacLeod:

On a journey from Grand Forks to Nelson I had torn off a strip of a cloud.

I had seen the grim Welshmen of Fernie pour out of
the earth like a stream
And walk through the city at midnight, like phantoms
that walk in a dream.
I had stood on a summit of Kaslo and gained new con-
ceptions of God,
Who, lifting the bulk of the mountains, could bend to
the flower on the sod.
I had chanted my songs to a trapper—a hundred miles
deep in the wild:
When I blew him a wisp of my music he wept with
the tears of a child.
I had read to strong men on the prairies my song of
Saskatchewan land;
And after the show they would tell me, with a fine,
prairie grip of the hand:
“Say, stranger, you’re right and we know it; and we
need men like you to be told
There are far truer measures than silver and far better
treasures than gold.”
I had read in the shacks of the hill-lands, where wealth
was the boast of a lamp;
For from Medicine Hat to Vancouver I knew all the
land like a tramp.
And never a cowboy or miner, and never a logger
that year
But gave me a Western reception and sent me away
with a cheer.
And I came to the towns of the Coast-line, where they
wear a brocade and a brogue,

Where "peas on your knife," with the Smart Set, and
"strangle your soup" are in vogue,
And, touching the ploughshare of fancy, I turned a
sweet rhyme of the earth—
A rhyme that had slept in the valleys since ever the
grasses had birth.
Before me were women whose culture was twenty
months old in the blood;
And men who had risen to greatness by pawning an
acre of mud.
And I sang them God's truths in my numbers—the
truths which their hearts had opposed.
And some of them laughed when I started, and all of
them sneered when I closed.
"The West has no place for a poet," said the corpulent
man with a sneer,
As we sat by the fire out at Harrison Lake in the spring
of the year:
"Musicians and poets and artists are all out of place in
the West:
I speak for the men of the mountains!" and he smote
his fat hand on his breast.
"I speak for the men of the mountains!" He lied
when he made that remark;
For how could the flesh of the sparrow speak out for
the soul of the lark?
Yea, how could a vain little sparrow, that whets on the
pavement its bill,
Know aught of the tang of wild berries that grow on
the brow of the hill?

So I said: "When I hear a man sneering at all that is sweetest or best
I know he is not of the Eastland, and I know he is not of the West.
He's a mongrel the East wouldn't stand for, and the man of the mountains ignores;
He made a few bucks in the boom days or else he'd be sweeping out stores.
He's like a soiled cat who sits snarling all night on the rim of a fence,
And thinks: "I'm a hell of a cougar; the tiger and I are immense!"
He speaks for the men of the mountains? Nay, the man of the West doesn't sneer.
It's the man that the East wouldn't stand for; and perhaps he has been here a year
When he swells out his chest like the fat man I met out at Harrison Springs,
And says: "We have no use for poets or any poor sissy who sings."

My friend is the miner at Coleman, the rancher beyond Pincher Creek,
The logger who rides into Vernon, with the kiss of the wind on his cheek.
But the ten-dollar clerk of the city, or the chewing-gum girl with the slang,
Or the half-naked daub from Vancouver, who drawls with the "400" twang,
Who couldn't tell ragtime from Handel, or Milton from old Mother Goose,

A two-dollar chromo from Rembrandt; and yet who
are quick to turn loose
Their sneers on the man who would pour them rare
wines of his art, for a toast;
But these are the breed of the mongrel—they're not
the pure blood of the Coast.

So, drink with me cowboys and miners; I'll pour you
a cup of my dreams.

My rhyme has grown strong in your mountains, and
pure in your glacier streams.

I'll limn you new flowers on the prairie; I'll show you
grim shapes in the crag;

And we'll dance with the maid of the North Wind a
far better dance than the rag.

The East hath her genius and culture; the West hath
her vigor and brawn;

And one hath the splendor of noonday, and one hath
the glory of dawn.

So, God give Thy smile to the Westland, wherever a
true heart abides;

And God give thy smile to the Eastland, and blot out
the line that divides.

Vancouver, B.C., March, 1914.

WHIST—WHEE!

“WHIST-WHEE!”
Little brown Dee
Peers from her shelter
Of bush and of tree.
Her time she is biding
To leap from her hiding.
And she says unto me:
“Don’t look this way, big man, or they’ll see
You are looking at me:
Please, please look out at the sea:
Whist-whee!”

And I walked up the sands,
And three little rebels took hold of my hands;
And they said: “Do you know
Where a little brown maid,
In a little brown plaid,
Did go?”
And I lied and said: “No.”
And they scampered away
Like young squirrels at play;
And looked all over and under the rocks
For a glimpse of brown frocks.
And I heard a quick cry
From the shade of the tree
Saying to me—
Yes, saying to me:
“You’re a dear, you’re a dear.”

And I said "Whist-whee;
The rebels are all returning for thee."
And she hugged to the tree.

"Whist-whee," just two little words:
But I heard them to-day in the song of the birds.
And the waters all sang as I walked by the sea:
"Whist-whee, whist-whee."
And I looked behind bush and I looked behind tree
And the birds still were there and the busy song bee.
But little brown Dee,
With her solemn "Whist-whee",
Spake not unto me.

And over the hills I went,
And a gentle mound
I found;
Lying like some fairy's lost pillow upon the ground.
And I knelt on my knee
And wrote on the sand,
With a sorrowing hand:
"Little brown Dee
Sleeps here by the sea:
All ye who pass
Whist-whee!"

San Francisco, California, September, 1914.

THIRD SONG WITHOUT A NAME

MY love upon my palette lies,
And on my brush my heart.
So is it strange a maiden walks
Each canvas of mine art?
I ne'er shall press this maiden's lips;
But, O, why should I thus despair
When I could mend my soul with one
Gold sunbeam of her hair?

Her faintest smile to me was meat
For banquets of my worshipping;
And yet she gave her love to one
Who held it as a common thing.
Strange world! that grants the blind a rose;
And music, where the waters meet,
Unto the deaf; while I must tread
My soul to dust upon the street.

Los Angeles, November, 1914.

THE GIRL BEHIND THE MAN BEHIND THE GUN

YOU have seen the line of khaki swinging grandly
down the street,
You have heard the band blare out Britannic
songs;
You have read a ton of papers and you've thrown them
at your feet,
And your brain's a battlefield for fighting throngs.
You have cheered for Tommy Atkins, and you've
yelled for Jack Canuck;
You have praised the French and Belgians, every one.
But I'm rhyming here a measure to the valor and the
pluck
Of the Girl Behind the Man Behind the Gun.

There's a harder game than fighting; there's a deeper
wound by far
Than the bayonet or the bullet ever tore.
And a patient, little woman wears upon her heart a
scar
Which the lonesome years will keep for evermore.
There are bands and bugles crying and the horses
madly ride,
And in passion are the trenches lost or won.
But SHE battles in the silence, with no comrade at
her side,
Does the girl behind the man behind the gun.

They are singing songs in Flanders and there's music
in the wind;
They are shouting for their country and their king.
But the hallways yearn for music in the homes they
left behind,
For the mother of a soldier does not sing.
In the silence of the night time, 'mid a ring of hidden
foes,
And without a bugle cry to cheer her on.
She is fighting fiercer battles than a soldier ever knows;
And her triumph—is an open grave at dawn.

You have cheered the line of khaki swinging grandly
down the street,
But you quite forgot to cheer another line.
They are plodding sadly homeward, with no music
for their feet,
To a far more lonely river than the Rhine.
Ah! the battlefield is wider than the cannon's sullen
roar;
And the women weep o'er battles lost or won.
For the man a cross of honor; but the crepe upon the
door
For the girl behind the man behind the gun.

When the heroes are returning and the world with flags
is red,
When you show the tattered trophies of the war,
When your cheers are for the living and your tears are
for the dead

Which the foeman in the battle trampled o'er.
When you fling your reddest roses at the horsemen in
array,
With their helmets flaming proudly in the sun,
I would bid you wear the favor of an apple-blossom
spray
For the girl behind the man behind the gun.

Victoria, B.C., January, 1915.

MARY MAHONE

A POET in soul is our Mary Mahone:
She walks with a sweetheart when walking alone.

A rose on her heart and a song on her lips,
Adown a shy path to the ocean she slips.

“A poet I’ll be;” said our Mary Mahone;
“And pour out my soul like the wind making moan.

“Like the wind making moan or the breakers that roll
I’ll pour out the passionate flood of my soul.”

A basket of roses at Ballymore grown
Was never as fair as was Mary Mahone.

“To-morrow,” she cried, “will I rise with the birds
And fashion a lyric from magical words.”

But at peep-o-the-morn came a lad up the hill
To tell her the widow O’Connor was ill.

And waiting no ribbon or bonnet of lace,
For fairer the sun on her hair and her face,

She came to the room where the sick woman lay:
And Death, when he saw her, soon hurried away.

O, woe to the poem of Mary Mahone
But joy to the miserable heart of a crone.

And Mary in April, agowned in a shower,
Danced up the green meadows and left them in flower.

“Ah, April,” she cried, “I have waited thee long:
A poet am I and I’ll sing thee a song.”

A lilt on her lips and a stranger passed by,
A limp in his foot and a tear in his eye.

“O, sir,” says my Mary, “you’re weary I see.”
“Yea, weary,” he cried, “for the moaning banshee.”

“O, sir,” says my maiden, “come up to the town:
The honey is gold and the biscuits are brown”

He felt her warm arm and he felt her wet hair,
And Heaven fell down upon Ireland right there.

So well was he nursed by our Mary Mahone
That his heart grew as fresh as the flowers at her zone

And, late in the summer, he went back to sea
With never a thought of the eerie banshee.

O woe to the poem of Mary Mahone;
But joy unto one of God’s many unknown.

Thus year after year saw the green turn to gold
And still was her song like a story untold.

“O never,” she cried, with a Celtic despair,
“Has God looked with favor upon my one prayer.”

And then on a May day, as fair as a bride,
Our Mary Mahone had a dream that she died.

And, straight up to Heaven she went, for they say
The Irish go up by no roundabout way.

The air was all music and, over its tone,
She heard good Saint Peter say: "Mary Mahone
"Pass up with the poets." But Mary replied:
"O, sir, I'm no poet, though often I've tried
"To write me a poem; but never could I
While there was a cheek which my fingers might dry."
But softly Saint Peter said: "High on his throne
God waits for the poet called Mary Mahone."
The Lord rose to meet her and all the white throng
Sang: "Hail to the poet who wrote the great song."
And Mary cried: "Lord, I am Mary Mahone,
And so many mortals around me made moan
"That I toiled by the day and I watched by the moon
And never found time to awaken a rune."
The Lord smiled upon her and all the white throng
Cried: "Hail to the poet who wrote the great song."
And Mary, bewildered, looked up and implored:
"Pray tell me what song I have written, O Lord?"
"Thy Life is the song," said the Lord in her dream;
"And Love is the metre and Love is the theme."
Then Mary awakened and Phoebus rose too
And drank to the poet in wine of the dew.
And this is the story of Mary Mahone.
And what if it too be a tale like thine own!

And what if the Master hath seen in thine eyes
The script of a poem they love in the skies.

For you, though a song reed you never have blown,
May too be a poet like Mary Mahone.

Vancouver, December, 1916.

SAINT ELIAS

HERE is no momentary majesty
That borrows from the season or the hour.
But ever is the queen upon her throne;
The bishop with his hands upraised to Heaven;
The soldier midst transfigurating fire.
Not girth of thy green girdle nor the thrust
That dares the scorn of Arcas, but the calm
Which mocks the changeful seasons at thy base
Inspires me to the music of this song.
Red August in the vales enwraps my hours
But thou hast white December all the year:
A whiter rose than ours that never fades;
So pure that I, a mortal, fain would know
Through what long twilight and beneath what suns
Hast thou kept fair thine everlasting snows!
The warlike Mars hath seen this flag of truce
Held patiently unsoled, and granted peace
Unto the Earth; hath turned the comet's course
On spheres that raise no chamaeleon. That pale orb,
When vapors veil the unambitious hills,
Doth lavish her cold kisses on thy brow.
'Tis thine to mediate twixt earth and sky;
And while thine head doth rise above the storm
Nor sun nor moon grows alien to the world.
Ah! who was He, who raised thy prostrate form
From long humility of level lands,
But One who hurls the mighty from their seats
And lifts on high the lowly sons of men!

O silent peak! The angels see thy thrust,
Above a sea of clouds, as men who looked
Upon the gleaming sword, Excalibur.
To mortals thou art something held aloof
When things familiar breed irreverence:
And that loud foot of conquest which blasphemers
The last, lone temple of the priestless wood
Shall never soil those fair, unwritten folds,
Where, on thy brow, God keepeth white a page
To pen His judgments on a boastful world.
Who looks up at thy chancel cannot keep
From out his vision noble fields of sky.
And deeper worshippers, when fretful creeds
Grow narrow as their pews, shall seek thy spires
And gain an unconfined theology.
Alone, and reverent, at thy base I stand:
Pour on my head the blessing. Could I sell
My birthright for a mess of pottage now?

'Tis summer and the prone limb of the earth
Is white with tender blossoms; madrigals
That wake the leaves make strange thy contrast's calm.
Ah! what a varied artist toned the hue
And limned the flower's minutest tracery
With hand that shaped this daring rise, that wears
So regal!y her tragic crown of snow.
Elias, Saint Elias! would that I
Might keep my head unsullied of the world;
And, like to thee, hold high cold Reason's dome
That bids thy clouds descend and slake the 'throats
Of fires that flame their passions round thy breast.

O dweller in gay Gotham, could I grant
Thy soul one breathless moment near this tower
How soon its soundless song would rouse the stars
That fell at virgin yieldings of thy youth!
How soon would fan the furnace of thy heart,
Consuming all her gods of yesterday!
How soon those vistas, washed with unclean light,
That lured thine eye from slim Alsarte's moon,
Would limn, in livid oils, their jaundiced glare!

Against the summer stars 'tis strange to see.
O noblest summit of a lordly line,
Thy wild, white smoking drifts of winter blow.
So long my soul upon this fare hath fed
I yearn to call my comrades to the feast
Through the clear trumpets of this blast of song.
Too long their eyes rasoial have been:
Too long their tongues have harped of gold and plains
Where night lies down on pillow of their bread.
Here is a loaf that breaks continually.
And lo! there's many a vacant chair that calls
A laggard limb to this pine-scented vale
Where Saint Elias walks to meet the sea;
Her cloudy breath about her as she goes.

Vancouver, B.C., 1916.

AT BROOKSIDE MANOR

ON Christmas Day I helped to widen a circle
At Brookside Manor.
I found mine host, the Master of the Manor,
To be a damn fool;
And therefore immediately liked him.
Who but a damn fool would invite a poet
To dine with him on Christmas Day
When any one of five score wealthy men
Would have accepted with joy the invitation?
Who but a damn fool, in this west land,
Would waste good money on wall paper
With a smoking tint.
Or sacrifice a precious hour
In study of the harmony of colors in a room?
Who but a vagabond of reason
Would translate to me
The music of a stream
That kept the lyric note of life alive
Beneath a casement of his dwelling place.

Women speak their endearments in soft phrases:
Weak men say affectionate things.
When I call a man a damn fool
My praise is noted of the gods.
Shakespeare was a damn fool;
Newton another.
And I'm trying as hard as Hell
To be one myself.

So, gentle Master of Brookside Manor,
Crave no praise higher than this,
Spoken of you by Wilson MacDonald, the poet:
"He was a damn fool;
And God loved him for it."

Kelowna, May, 1916.

SOMEWHERE, SOMETIME THE GLORY

THE fog is heavy to-night and the sad horns are droning.

What so sad as a bank of mist that cannot weep into rain?

A little, old man comes down the road where you and I are moaning;

A little, old man who sings a song and here is the rune's refrain :

Somewhere, sometime the glory;
Somewhere the sun.

I'll read me on to the end of the story:
God's will be done.

O little, old man you shame me; for the weak oft shame the strong.

The fog is heavy to-night and the sad horns are crying.

What so sad as a pair of lips that cannot break into song;

And learn so long as we keep a song Hope shall know no dying?

Somewhere, sometime the glory; let me but keep this shard,

Torn from the crumbling mountain peaks of our philosophies.

Bring me hither the music man, the brother of the
bard,
And he shall mate it with music from the lips of
seven seas.

Somewhere, sometime the glory;
Somewhere the sun.
I'll read me on to the end of the story:
God's will be done.

Vancouver, October, 1916.

FRANCE

MY heart goes out to France, the Queen in war,
In carnival and love; the gay, the brave.
To that young blue-eyed Breton who would save
A dance for Death or for his Belle Aurore.
Who keeps so purely in his heart the lore
Of love and honor while the tyrant guns
Spume at his wisp of flesh their flaring tons,
White hot from maddened ages gone before.
The world's barometer is in that lad—
That Breton peasant against whom is hurled
The wild, down-leaping chariot of Mars.
When France is laughing all the Earth is glad.
And when she weeps the windows of the world
Are darkened to the sun and to the stars.

Vancouver, B.C., January, 1917.

GIFTS

SO small a measure are these gifts of mine
To lay upon the altar of the King.
My genius, when all garnered, shall but bring
A scanty measure of the purer wine.
A wisp of music and a lilting line,
A meagre word of beauty from the store
Of language and her multitude; what more
Have I to offer for Thy love divine?
How shall the moon repay her borrowed ray?
Of one blue flower of England count her gain
From that old, upward look at Dorian skies!
Or those white, curving throats on Biscay Bay
Restore their debt, by some august refrain,
To that strange beauty in Selene's eyes!

Vancouver, February, 1917.

BY HOWE SOUND

FIGHT on, old world, fight on!
Thou shalt awaken soon,
And all thy dreams be gone
To mate the moon.
The pale, haggard moon whose days of strife
Have long since grown cold;
The wan, floating moon,
Whose cargo once was gold.

I have lived to see that hour
When all my soul hath caught,
In her white fancy's cup,
Is dashed away as naught.
From this small camp of souls
To that great camp I go.
The large sword swings in each
When the winds blow.

I turn from the world of cares
To this old apple tree,
Whose fragile, fragrant wares
Are spread for the sun to see.
It breathes no different breath
At the cry of the gun:
It only knows of Death
When the day is done.

Yon sweet-voiced chapel bell
Sang once a luring song:

Sometimes I went to hear old men
Rage at the tide of wrong.
Red now are the chapel halls:
The large sword swings in each.
Soiled are the pure walls
By the vanity of speech.

At the first cry of the gun
They altered all their prayers.
Hate donned the vestry garb,
And Love walked down the stairs.
O sweeter grows the wind
That changeth not her creed.
So am I come out here
To join the cold sea-weed.

A black, old ship throws off
The cramping cloak of land;
And, naked, bids the sea
All her strong limbs command.
I sit here on this shore
And watch the clouds go by;
And wonder why men left for me
These pastures of the sky.

Vancouver, B.C., May, 1917.

PEACE

FLOW, flag, in the soft wind ; blow, bugle, blow ;
The day we dreamed of through the years is here.
Lowered is Mars' red spear ;
And the shot-peopled air,
Tired of the wild trumpet's blare,
Tired of the upturned, glassy eyes of men,
Is quiet again.
Discord has fled with her gigantic peals,
And, at her heels,
Walks the old silence of the long ago.
Flow, flag, in the soft wind ; blow, bugles, blow.

The upturned faces of the world to-day
Are like the laughing waves of a sea in May.
Tears are a lost art of a hateful dream ;
Laughter is King, is King.
Blow, bugles, blow ; let the wild sirens scream,
Let the mad music ring,
Until the very flowers shall nod and sing.
I hear the lusty cheers of youth whose years
Were blown to the crag's black edge ;
I see the Hours quaff up a mother's tears
As the sun drinks dew upon a Devon hedge.
No more shall the sad wires transmit the dole
That gnaws into the soul.
And that vast company we call the dead
Shall know the flag of Peace flies overhead
Because of the new lightness of our tread.

In Flanders now the birds find their first wonder
Since that loud August thunder
That shattered the blue skies like broken glass.
The wonder now is that the thing is dead
That passed, with crimson tread,
Over the silken floor of fragrant grass—
The screaming, blatant woe
That turned his plowshare in the flowers and sowed,
By the quiet, dreaming road,
His crop of gleaming crosses, row on row.
Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow.

Like as a river dries up in the light
Our tears have blown to vapor.
The airplanes drop down in their droning flight
Like floating paper.
The gun that camouflaged her brutal throat
In Bourlon's thicket
Shall dream to-night in wonder at the note
Of some lone cricket.
And, where a maddened cuirassier grew gory
In that wild, sudden clash of yesterday,
Some docile, blue-eyed youth will sing a story,
And laughing, dancing children's feet will play.

The world is blown with color like a flower
In this triumphant hour.
The great procession grows, their shining feet
Sandalled with dewy peace.
I watch them passing up the city street;
Gaining on life a new and wondrous lease.

Old men who pick up life like a broken rose
Which they had thrown away;
Old women who unbind their temple snows
And comb them up for a new holiday;
Young maidens, all their spirits like the flow
Of the new melted snow;
Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow.

This that we hear is but a shining drop
In the glad sea of mirth.
The tide flows round the world and will not stop
Until it brims the earth.
The Bedouin Arab now invites his dance
Where the sandstorms croon;
And a mad company in lilting France
Unwind a rigadoon.
Down a soft English lane
Wild, happy, blue-eyed children chase the rain.
They wrap their throats in song from Maine to where
The Golden Gate unwinds her mist of hair.
One grief alone we have; blow, bugle, blow;
The crosses stand in Flanders, row on row.
They shall not watch with us to-day nor fare
On our bright bugles blare.

Flow, flag, in the soft wind; blow, bugles, blow;
And then, at e'en, when all the lights are dim,
Let us pour out our thanks in praise to Him
Who gave the peace we know.

Toronto, November 11th, 1918.

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